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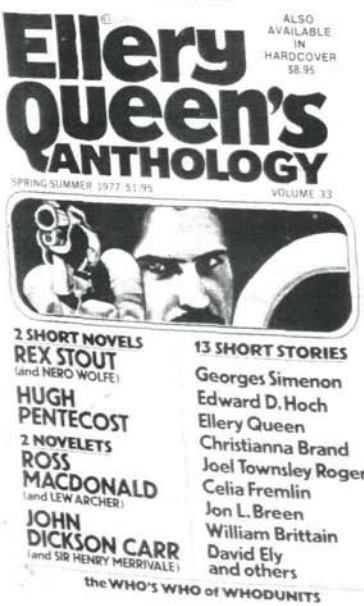

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PRESIDENT & PUBLISHER: *Joel Davis* **EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: *Ellery Queen***

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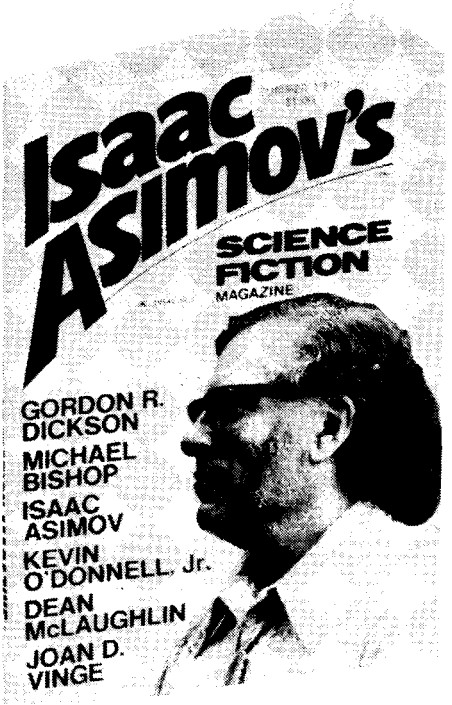

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a *NEW* Interpol Story by
EDWARD D. HOCH

The Interpol investigators are back—Sebastian Blue, former Scotland Yard man, and Laura Charme, his partner-in-prying . . . Almost all the women seeking temporary sanctuary in the Gloucester Ladies Aid Society home were wives who had been beaten by their husbands. "Terrible thing," Dr. Wren said, "and it seems to be getting worse, not only in England but all over Europe. Battered wives . . ."

The Interpol case in which Laura Charme came into her own as a detective . . .

INTERPOL: The Case of the Battered Wives

by EDWARD D. HOCH

ebastian Blue carefully adjusted the heavily padded boxing glove on his right fist and turned smiling to face Laura Charme. "Ready, my dear?"

"Now really, Sebastian. Do we have to go through with this?"

"It's the only way I can think of."

"I came to London with you expecting a good time and instead I find myself being beaten up in a hotel room in the West End!"

"There are better days coming," Sebastian assured her.

Laura took a deep breath. "All right, then. Do your damnedest!"

Sebastian took careful aim and hit her quite solidly on the left cheek and eye. She gasped and toppled backward onto the bed.

"Perhaps just one more," he said, and bent to the task.

The big old Victorian house in the West End of London bore only a small painted sign announcing it as the Gloucester Ladies Aid Society. When Laura Charme reached the door and rang the bell it was already growing dark. Inside, dimmed by the thickness

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of drapes, she could see lights beginning to come on.

The door opened after a few moments and a buxom middle-aged woman peered out. It took her an instant to adjust her eyes to the failing light and to make out the bruised and swollen face before her. Then she threw open the door. "You poor child! Come right in!"

Laura collapsed sobbing in her arms, feeling the strong comforting hands on her back and shoulders. "I—I didn't know where else to go. He threatened to beat me again if I called the police."

"Now, now, child, you've come to the right place. At GLAS there's a home for everyone. You must be chilled clear through in those damp clothes. Come in by the fire."

She guided Laura into a cozy sitting room where two young women played cards near a crackling fire. "Thank you so much," Laura said. "May I stay here for a while?"

The woman smiled. "For as long as you like! My name is Lucy Watson and these are two of our girls, Carol and Angela."

"I'm Laura Clark."

The dark-haired one named Angela got up from the table and came to help comfort her. "Your husband do this to you, dearie?"

"Y-yes." Laura began to sob again.

"Dr. Wren will look you over. I don't think it's much worse than a black eye, really, but I know it feels terrible now. You should see how some of the girls arrive here! Carol's husband gave her two broken ribs and some nasty burns."

The blonde-haired girl named Carol nodded agreement. "A few days and you'll be good as new. Mrs. Watson takes good care of us."

Laura soon learned that the big house was a temporary home for more than 30 young women, some with small babies accompanying them. Almost all were there as a result of being beaten by their husbands. "Terrible thing," Dr. Wren said as he applied a soothing salve to her bruises, "and it seems to be getting worse, not only in England but all over Europe. Battered wives—I suppose it's always been a problem but now people are talking about it, and newspapers are writing about it."

He was a graying, friendly man with a light professional manner. Laura could imagine any number of the GLAS ladies falling in love with him under the circumstances. "Have you been here long, Doctor?"

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"I'm not really here at all," he explained with a smile. "I maintain a general practice at my home across the street. But Mrs. Watson often calls me in. How did you hear about GLAS?"

"It was a newspaper article somewhere. I remember thinking this sort of thing could never happen to me, but that was before my Freddy took to drinking."

"I see." He finished his task and wiped away the excess salve. "Well, you can settle in here for as long as you like."

"Mrs. Watson says I can share a room with Carol and Angela. The girl with them just moved out."

"That's right." He helped her out of the chair. "Are you French, Laura? I detect an accent."

"My father was French. But I've lived in London for years."

Lucy Watson came in with a nightgown and a robe. "Slip into these, dear. You'll feel lots more comfortable."

"Is—is it going to cost me much to stay here?"

"No more than you're able to contribute. GLAS and similar homes in London are supported by the Department of Health and Social Security and some private funding. Come on now, I'll show you your room."

Later, as Laura climbed into the bunk bed above Angela, she asked the dark-haired girl, "How long have you been at GLAS?"

"Three months. But I'll be moving on soon."

"Going back to your husband?"

"You've got to be kidding! I'm leaving England, getting as far away from crazy Eddie as I can. Mrs. Watson has found me a good position abroad. Keep your nose clean and she may do the same for you."

Laura pulled the thin blanket around her. "What sort of position?"

"Quiet down, you two!" Carol yelled from the bunk across the room. "I'm trying to sleep!"

"Sorry," Laura whispered, deciding not to press it. The day had been a good beginning.

Sebastian Blue strode quickly along the hallway of Interpol's modern headquarters building in a Paris suburb, aware that he was five minutes late for a meeting with the Secretary-General. Years of Scotland Yard training had made him conscious of the necessity for prompt appointments and he wasn't surprised when the Secretary-General greeted him coolly.

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"Glad you finally arrived, Sebastian."

"The traffic, sir."

"Are you working on anything urgent at the moment?"

"Laura's in London on an undercover assignment," Sebastian explained, "and I'm backing her up. I'm only in Paris for the day. I want to fly back to London tonight."

"Does her London assignment deal with the shipboard-gambling situation?"

Sebastian nodded. Just recently his specialization in airline crime had been broadened to include all modes of international travel. "Interpol has always been interested in gamblers and confidence men. The recent upsurge in gambling casinos aboard cruise ships has merely legalized the high-stakes card and dice games one could always find there. We believe crooked gamblers who once earned their living on ocean liners and trans-Atlantic flights are now supplying specially trained dealers and dice girls for these floating casinos."

"How does this tie in with London?" the Secretary-General asked. "I'm asking because we have an art theft situation in New York which could use your expertise when you're available."

"Well, we believe there's a house in London's West End that may be the source of these dealers and dice girls. It's used as a temporary home for battered wives—women fleeing from sadistic husbands and the like. These women are naturally alone and friendless or they wouldn't seek shelter there in the first place. Our investigation indicates they may be recruited somehow from this home to work the cruise ships as croupiers—and to cheat the players every chance they get."

"Laura Charme is investigating this home?"

Sebastian nodded. "I fixed her up to look like a battered wife and she's been there a week now."

"All right," the Secretary-General said. "You'd better stick with Laura. But as soon as you wind it up I'd like you to fly to New York."

Laura's first week at GLAS had passed uneventfully. The bruises on her face were healing quickly and she'd been accepted by the other girls without question. Often in the evening Carol and Angela asked about her husband and their life together, savoring every detail of her invented misery as they contributed details of their own tortured lives.

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Laura saw a good deal of Dr. Wren too, and quickly learned that he was a regular visitor to the house. Even when there were no girls to be treated he often spent an hour closeted with Lucy Watson in her private office.

But there was another visitor who seemed to take a special interest in Laura following the first stages of her recovery. He was an elderly man named Winston Mathers who lived on the next street. Walking slowly with two canes, he made his way around the block every noon when the sun was out, stopping to rest and chat on the GLAS front porch.

"You're new here," he said to Laura the first time he saw her. "I haven't been by the last few days because of the rain. When did you come?"

"Just over a week ago," Laura said. It was a pleasant spring day and she'd been seated alone on the porch when Mathers approached.

"Fine place here. Mrs. Watson is a saint to help you girls."

"I know," Laura agreed.

"I like to stop here on my walks because this was once my uncle's house."

"Oh?"

"Have you never heard of MacGregor Mathers and the Order of the Golden Dawn?" he asked, warming to what Laura guessed was a familiar story-telling session.

"I don't think so."

"Before your time, of course. Its beginnings were even before my time, back around 1887. It was a secret society founded by my uncle, which is said to have attracted scores of important literary figures. The demonic Aleister Crowley was a member, of course, along with Yeats, Chesterton, Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood, Sax Rohmer, Lord Dunsany, Rider Haggard, and perhaps even Bram Stoker."

"What did they do?" Laura asked.

"The Order of the Golden Dawn attempted to achieve spiritual elevation through the study of magic and mysticism. My uncle claimed to have been personally instructed by a great mystic from the past—perhaps Saint-Germain—and until Crowley stole the Order's secrets and fragmented it, he was an influence unequaled in the literary world of early Twentieth Century England."

Laura wondered how much of this was true, and made a mental note to learn more about it. Aloud she said, "How interesting."

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Mrs. Watson appeared at that moment, clearly displeased at finding Mathers settled in on the porch. "Shouldn't you be getting along, Mr. Mathers? Won't they be worried about you?"

"No one to worry about me. I come and go as I please." But he got his canes into position and raised himself to his feet.

After he'd departed, Mrs. Watson said, "I don't think his uncle ever lived here. He just uses that as an excuse to talk with the girls."

"At least he breaks up the boredom."

"You're bored here, my dear? After only a week?"

"I want to be *doing* something, Mrs. Watson."

The buxom woman appeared to give it some thought. "Well, dear, there is a possibility. Some of my girls have been placed in jobs outside England by one of GLAS's benefactors."

"Who's that?"

"Now, now, don't you trouble your head about it. Let me speak to him about you."

And so it was arranged.

That night, lying in her bunk bed and gazing at the ceiling, Laura asked Carol, "What happens to the girls who leave here? Angela says Mrs. Watson has found her a job."

"Don't you worry about that. She takes care of us when the time comes."

Laura turned over to her other side. She could never adjust herself to sleeping in an upper bunk. "Where is Angela tonight?"

"Out somewhere. Maybe sleeping over at a friend's."

"I think I'll take her bed," Laura said. "It'll be a treat to get a sound night's sleep close to the floor for a change."

"Go ahead. If she comes in late she can take the upper."

Laura climbed down to the lower bunk and was asleep in two minutes.

It was the dripping that awakened her.

As regular as a leaky faucet, hitting the floor near her head.

Something from above, but not from the ceiling.

Something from the upper bunk.

She came fully awake and reached out a tentative hand.

Sticky. Not water.

She slipped silently from between the sheets and stood up. In the darkness she could barely make out the figure in the upper bunk, but she knew it had to be Angela.

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Angela was in her bed and Angela was dead.

Someone had entered the room and silently cut her throat.

Laura felt her stomach begin to heave and she steadied herself. There was a movement from the other bed and Carol whispered, "Is that you, Laura?"

"My God, someone's killed Angela in my bed!"

Carol turned on the lights and started to scream. In a moment Lucy Watson and several of the girls were clustered in the doorway. "I'll call Dr. Wren," the buxom woman said, taking immediate charge. "The rest of you go back to your rooms."

Then Dr. Wren himself appeared, uncalled, and quickly examined the dead girl. "It's too late," he said. "Call the police."

"We've never had anything like this before," Mrs. Watson moaned. "Do you think her husband sneaked in the back door and did it?"

"She was sleeping in Laura's bunk," Carol told them. "We thought she'd be out for the night, so Laura took the lower one."

Dr. Wren grunted. "So you might have been the intended victim, Laura."

"Oh, I don't think so."

"Your Freddy beat you, didn't he?" Mrs. Watson said. "Maybe he wanted to kill you. You'll have to tell the police about him."

"Yes," Laura agreed. She knew her cover was slipping away fast. She needed Sebastian to help her, to deal with his old acquaintances at Scotland Yard. "I think I should phone my uncle for advice."

She glanced again at the blanket-covered body on the bunk, and found herself wondering what Dr. Wren had been doing at GLAS in the middle of the night.

Sebastian Blue listened to Laura's voice on the telephone as she quickly outlined the night's events. Then he spoke a few reassuring words and promised to get in touch with Claude Jennings at the Yard. Laura knew how difficult that would be for him. Jennings was the man who'd married Sebastian's former wife.

She hung up quickly as Mrs. Watson entered the sitting room. "Did you get through to your uncle, dear?"

"Yes, I did."

"Fine. If you feel up to it, the Scotland Yard man would like to question you now."

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Laura stalled for time, answering routine questions from a youngish deputy inspector named Crocker. Presently, as she was vaguely relating the lies about her husband Freddy, a tall handsome man strode quickly into the room. "Hello," he said with a smile. "I'm Inspector Jennings. You can go now, Crocker. I'll finish the questioning."

When they were alone Laura sighed with relief. "Sebastian was able to reach you."

Jennings nodded. "Got me out of bed, but that's all right. I suppose I owe him a favor or two. Don't worry, we won't expose your cover story."

"Thank you."

"But if you really were the intended victim, another attempt could be made. I could take you safely away from here right now if you wish."

"No," Laura decided. "If someone tried to kill me, I want to know who and why. Let's see what tomorrow brings."

She was remembering Mrs. Watson's promise of a possible job, and wondering if it would still happen now that murder had come to the Gloucester Ladies Aid Society.

Old Winston Mathers braced himself on his two canes and began talking. "I didn't finish my story yesterday, about what happened to the Order of the Golden Dawn."

Seated on the porch with Carol, Laura was in no mood for more of his rambling history. "You'll have to excuse me, Mr. Mathers, but we're all pretty much upset today. A girl was killed last night."

He nodded. "Heard about it."

"In *our* room!" Carol added. "It could have been either of us as easily as poor Angela!"

"Terrible thing. Must have been a sneak thief."

Further conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a small car in front of the house. A long-haired young man in dungarees and a turtleneck sweater got out and came up the walk. "I came for Angela's things," he told them, mounting the steps. "I'm her husband Eddie."

Laura heard Carol's sharp intake of breath. They both remembered Angela's stories of the beatings she'd received before coming to GLAS. This Eddie who stood before them might have been a personification of Laura's own mythical Freddy.

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"We were Angela's roommates," Laura managed to say.

"That so? I bet you heard a pack of lies about me. How I beat her and all that stuff?"

"We heard things," Laura confirmed.

"Bet she never told you the reason for it, did she? How she'd stay out all night and come home in the morning with an expensive brooch or pearl necklace? Probably one of her boy friends killed her."

"We were sleeping in the room with her," Laura said quietly. "She wouldn't have brought a man up there."

"Well, I didn't drive in from Greenwich to talk about her morals. Give me her belongings and I'll be off."

Carol went to call Mrs. Watson and in a moment the woman appeared carrying a heavy suitcase. "This is everything of Angela's," she announced. "The police have been through it all and released it."

Instead of taking the suitcase and departing, Eddie placed it on the porch table and unsnapped the lock. "I'll just check what's here," he said, glancing suspiciously at old Mathers.

"You don't need to do that," Mrs. Watson objected.

"Yes, I do." He pawed through the folded dresses and slacks and undergarments, obviously searching for something. Finally, convinced it wasn't there, he asked, "Where's the jewelry?"

Mrs. Watson bristled. "Everything she came with is there!"

"What she came with was a pearl necklace and a couple of diamond brooches. Worth a few thousand pounds, they were, if I've got eyes in my head. And I want 'em!"

"She never had any such thing," Mrs. Watson insisted. "Or if she did she must have pawned them."

Eddie took a step closer to the woman, and a switchblade knife appeared suddenly in his right hand. "Let me have 'em and there'll be no trouble."

Then several things happened at once. Mrs. Watson let out a hoarse scream and tried to back away, overturning one of the wicker porch chairs. Eddie lunged with his knife, perhaps only trying to frighten her, but Laura couldn't wait to be sure. She gave an expert karate kick to his leg and Eddie went down hard, the knife flying from his grasp.

"Wow!" Carol exclaimed. "Where'd you learn that?"

"I picked it up. Mrs. Watson, I suggest you call that Inspector Jennings and tell him what's happened."

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"I certainly will." She cast a scornful glance at the man on the floor and hurried into the house.

Later, after Jennings had arrived and taken Eddie away for questioning, Laura found an opportunity to speak with Mrs. Watson. "Yesterday, before all this terrible business, you said you'd talk to someone about a job for me."

"So I did. I spoke with Dr. Wren and he thinks he may be able to fix you up."

"Dr. Wren." She wasn't surprised. "He was in the house last night when Angela died, wasn't he?"

Mrs. Watson flushed slightly. "I was having . . . stomach pains. He came to see what the trouble was. But it was nothing serious."

"Mrs. Watson, who do you think killed Angela?"

"Well, dear, you saw her husband come at me with a knife! Doesn't that answer your question?"

"How could he have entered the house?"

"The back door was unlocked. Or Angela might have let him in."

"What for? Certainly not to invite him to a room she shared with two other girls. Besides, she was undressed and in bed when she was killed."

"I can't bother my mind about it. The police have him and that's that. Now I'll give Dr. Wren a call and see if he can talk to you."

A half hour later Laura was seated in Dr. Wren's comfortable office across the street. He busied himself with the details of a medical case history before turning his attention to her. "Mrs. Watson thought I might be able to help you with a job."

Laura nodded. "I'm anxious to get away now that my bruises are almost healed. I remember Angela telling me Mrs. Watson had found a good position for her outside of England. I hate to sound callous, but now that she's dead maybe I could take her place in this job."

"Very likely." He touched the tips of his fingers together. "The job Angela accepted involves work at a mission hospital in central Africa. The pay is very low, but I'm sure you'll find it rewarding."

"Africa? I had the impression from her that it involved shipboard duties."

"You must have misunderstood. The only position I have to offer is in Africa. I've supplied occasional aides to this hospital in the past."

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"Well," Laura hedged, "I'll have to think about it."

"Do that." He smiled and stood up. "Now if you'll excuse me, I have some patients waiting."

Laura walked back across the street. Either Dr. Wren was a very clever man or else their information about GLAS had been wrong from the beginning.

Though it was almost dark, old Winston Mathers was on the porch again. "Taking another walk?" Laura asked.

"I like you. I came back to see you."

Laura paused on her way to the door. "I'm still a bit distraught over everything that's happened. Maybe we can talk tomorrow."

He smiled up from his chair, both hands resting on the tops of his canes. "Tomorrow might be too late. Lucy Watson and Dr. Wren tried to kill you last night."

"I—"

"They got the wrong girl because you changed bunks, but next time they'll be more careful."

"Why are you telling me this?" Laura asked.

"To save you. I can get you away from here—now, tonight."

"And take me where, Mr. Mathers? Your Order of the Golden Dawn doesn't exist any more, you know."

"Never mind that," he said. "I can help you get away from here. I've helped many other GLAS girls."

Suddenly she was seeing him in a new light. He wasn't old Mathers any more. "Maybe I need help. Tell me more about it."

"I can get you a job working on cruise ships. A glamorous life where you'll meet new people—rich people. You won't have to worry about your husband ever finding you."

She debated only a moment. "How soon could I leave?"

"Now, tonight. You can even leave your clothes behind if you want to. We'll buy you everything new. Come with me now to my house and meet my associates. You're just the sort of girl we're looking for. You demonstrated it with that bully Eddie this afternoon."

As it grew darker, lights began to come on in the house. "Just let me get a sweater and I'll come with you," she said.

"Not a word to anyone."

"Don't worry."

Upstairs, Carol asked, "Where you going now?"

"Out for a while. Don't worry if I'm not back by bedtime."

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Carol grinned. "A man?"

"Sort of."

Then she hurried down the stairs and out to the sidewalk where Winston Mathers waited, supported by his canes.

At eight o'clock that evening Sebastian decided to visit the GLAS house with Jennings, playing the role of the concerned uncle. Lucy Watson greeted them at the door.

"I don't know what all this fuss is about. Laura's perfectly safe here," she insisted.

"I'd still like to see her," Sebastian said.

"Well, you can't. She's not here."

Carol appeared on the stairs behind Mrs. Watson. "Are they looking for Laura? She told me she was going out. Said she might not be back this evening."

"Did she say where she was going?" Sebastian asked.

"I think it was with a man. I even looked out the window and watched her go—but the only man I saw with her was old Mathers."

Jennings turned back to Mrs. Watson. "Who is Mathers?"

"He lives on the next street. Walks with two canes and stops by every day to talk with the girls. Old lecher, if you ask me!"

"Can you point out his house to us?"

"I suppose so."

Laura shifted uneasily on the couch in Mathers' living room. The house was expensively furnished and not at all what she'd expected. Neither were Mathers' two companions. They were tough young hoods, well dressed but obviously dangerous.

"You work for us," the one named George was explaining, "and you'll be wearing mink. We set you up as a croupier on a cruise ship to the Caribbean and you take orders from us. We'll teach you all the tricks, with cards, dice, and roulette wheels. The pay will be good and you'll meet important people—wealthy people. Just one thing you gotta remember—if you cross us, or disobey our orders at the gaming tables, what you got from your husband will be nothing compared to what you'll get from us!"

"I don't think I like this," Laura said. "I think I want to go back to Mrs. Watson's."

Old Mathers shook his head. "You already know too much to go back. You could end up like Angela."

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"You killed Angela?"

"We didn't kill anyone, but it shows you what can happen to girls these days."

"I—"

They heard the sound of a car door closing outside, and George hurried to the window. "What is this? They look like police!"

Laura cursed softly under her breath and saw Mathers slip a pistol out of his pocket. "You've tricked us, dear girl. I should never have trusted you."

Laura sprang to one side, catching the third man off balance and sending him tumbling into Mathers. Then she leaped at George just as he turned from the window.

Moments later, when Sebastian and Jennings entered, she was holding a gun on the three. "Happy as I am to see you, I do wish you'd have given me a little more time."

Sebastian looked over the situation and grinned. "Are these the fellows we've been looking for?"

Laura nodded, surrendering the gun to Inspector Jennings. "They've been recruiting girls from GLAS to work at crooked gaming tables on cruise ships. With Interpol's file on the case you should have enough evidence for arrests."

"What about the murder?" Jennings asked.

"That's something else entirely," Laura replied. "Come back with me to GLAS and I'll try to explain."

Dr. Wren was in the sitting room with Lucy Watson and some of the girls when they returned. "We're so glad you're safe, dear," Mrs. Watson said. "Your uncle was worried."

Laura glanced around the room. "Where's Carol?"

"Upstairs, I suppose. Why?"

"Inspector Jennings is here to arrest her for murder."

She'd told it all in the car driving over from Mathers' house, but now she told it again. "You see, it had to be Carol because she was the only one who knew I was asleep in the lower bunk. Anyone else trying to murder Angela would have gotten me instead in that darkened room, since I was in her bed."

"How did you know they weren't after you?" Sebastian asked. "I'm not clear on that point."

"The only motive for killing me would be to forestall the Interpol investigation of shipboard gambling. But as it turned out, neither Mrs. Watson nor Dr. Wren was involved in that.

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Whatever the doctor's motive in visiting Mrs. Watson's bedroom in the middle of the night, they weren't criminal." Dr. Wren coughed gently and looked at the floor. "And certainly if Mathers tried to kill me because he knew I was with Interpol, he never would have approached me today as a recruit. So there was no motive for killing me and Angela must have been the intended victim all along."

"But why?" Mrs. Watson asked.

"One of the oldest of all motives. Carol must have seen the valuable jewelry Eddie told us about. She wanted it, and when I changed bunks with Angela last night she saw her chance to get it. When she heard Angela come in and take my bunk, she waited till the girl was asleep and then cut her throat, knowing the confusion of bunks would cause uncertainty about the intended victim. If the killer had been anyone else in the house—or someone from outside—the killer wouldn't have known where to look for her in the dark. And certainly if a flashlight had been used, Carol or I would have been awakened. No, it had to be Carol all along. She committed a terrible crime for a few pieces of jewelry."

But Carol had heard them talking on the way to her room, and when Jennings hit the door with his shoulder she went out the window. Whether she meant to jump or simply lost her footing on the roof tiles, they never knew. She landed on the paved driveway below and died later that night at the hospital.

"She did a poor job of hiding the jewelry," Sebastian told Laura the following morning. "Jennings found it in her big jar of cold cream. And the knife she used was in the toilet tank."

"To think I shared a room with a murderess, and slept right through a killing! I was so pleased with the lower bunk that I slept like a log!"

"Good thing you did," Sebastian said.

"What about Mathers?"

"It's Jennings' case now. He has our complete file."

"He's not such a bad sort, for a Scotland Yard man."

Sebastian smiled. "No, I suppose my former wife could have done much worse."

Laura bit her lower lip. "I just thought of something."

"What's that?"

"I never even knew Carol's last name."

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a *NEW* short story by
EDWARD WELLEN

Orville Kesten ran a printer's shop that was a profitable operation. It gave him and his family a feeling of security—a good life, a lovely home, and an unclouded future. Then Morrow came to town . . .

SILENT PARTNER

by EDWARD WELLEN

Orville Kesten had a feeling from the first that there was more to Thomas Morrow than Morrow's smooth front. He was not sure he wanted to find out what that was. But business was business, and Morrow had hardly hit town before throwing some business Kesten's way.

Morrow ordered business cards and letterheads showing him to be in market research. The research seemed primarily a pressing interest in the Okay Printers plant and capabilities. Kesten gave him the tour and, back in the office, showed him samples of Okay's work.

Looking impressed, Morrow thumbed through the samples. "You certainly turn out some good stuff."

Kesten felt himself flush. "Thanks. We try to do our best."

"Yes, sir, nice little layout you have here. Just what we've been looking for." An abrupt change to an almost smothering warmth of tone and expression. "How about having lunch with me? Since I'm new here, maybe you can fill me in on the people I ought to get to know."

Kesten glanced at the clock to see if it jibed with his stomach. "All right."

Morrow seemed to make perfunctory mental notes as Kesten discreetly pointed out the bank president, the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, two lawyers, the judge, two real-estate men, and other genteelly feeding faces.

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"Fine. I appreciate that." Another abrupt change. "Tell you what. Let's finish up and take a little drive. You don't have to hurry back to the office. That's part of the pleasure of being your own boss, isn't it?" Morrow smiled. "What I have to say to you is too confidential for these walls."

Kesten's queasiness increased, but he shrugged and let Morrow beat him to the tab. Morrow was the type to make a point of beating others to the tab, both because it made him feel big at the moment and because he knew he would beat you out of much more in the end. Kesten sighed silently as he left with Morrow. The least he could do was hear the man out. He knew he would have to, sooner or later. Better sooner. The suspense of waiting for bad tidings only spoiled more of one's life.

Morrow drove with his hands on the wheel in the proper ten-to-two position. They rode in small talk till Morrow pulled up at the city limits, beside a standard bearing the Lions and Rotary emblems.

Another abrupt change. Was this suddenly unsmiling face the real Morrow? "I'll level with you, Kesten. I represent a conglomerate and your firm is a prospective acquisition for us."

Kesten nodded. "I thought it would be something like that."

Morrow grinned. "You did, did you?"

Kesten shook his head. "Sorry, Morrow. I have to tell you that you're wasting your time. Okay Printers is not for sale."

Morrow's grin didn't fade. "Our time is too valuable to waste. Believe me, we're not wasting it. We're out to acquire Okay Printers and we will acquire it."

Kesten arched an eyebrow. "I don't see how. It's a closely held corporation. All the stock's in my name and my wife's and my child's."

"Sure, we know that. But we don't exactly propose to buy you out. We're rather offering to become your silent partner. We admire your management capabilities and printing expertise too much to want to squeeze you out altogether. We'd like you to keep on running the shop. All we really want is access to your facilities."

Kesten let one corner of a smile form. "What do you have in mind? Is your conglomerate in the entertainment field? Would you be wanting Okay Printers to work nights and weekends grinding out counterfeit record labels and jackets? And maybe from time to time some blue material—gimcrack porn?"

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Suddenly Morrow's smooth front peeled away, leaving only the naked nasty grin. "Good. We don't have to play games any more. I'll give it to you straight. My outfit's cutting itself in, whether you like it or not. And here's some advice—at no charge. If you're thinking all you have to do after we split is pick up the phone and call the cops, think again. Your hick police force couldn't find cheese in Wisconsin. On the other hand, we can always find you." He paused. "And your wife and kid."

Kesten's half smile froze, the chill coming all the way from his heart. "Don't worry, I won't call the cops. Anyway, they can only come in after I've suffered the damage. I realize what I'm up against."

"That's right, a stone wall. So don't you try to stonewall it, Kesten. I'll get in touch with you tomorrow for your answer. And your answer'd better be yes."

Something made Kesten argue a lost cause. "I could say no to you and sell out for what I can get. I've had offers. Or I could just walk away from the business."

"Don't try to kid me, Kesten. At your age and settled the way you are, with the all-American mortgage on your life, you can't just walk away from your family responsibilities. And I don't see you trying to start all over again in a new community."

Kesten rebelled at that—in theory. "There's always a chance to make a new beginning."

"Sure. But the odds are you'd make a sorry ending. You'd have to sell your plant at a loss, and then have to watch expenses eat up your stake while you tried to get going again." Then Morrow tossed him a bone. "Look at it this way, Kesten. With us as your partner, you can expand the business. You'll wind up making more money than you ever have."

"I'm satisfied with what I make now."

"You only think you're satisfied."

"Maybe." Kesten eyed Morrow narrowly. "Tell me something, Morrow. If your outfit sees Okay Printers as a good thing worth moving in on, what's to keep another outfit from doing the same? Suppose I committed myself and then somebody else comes along and tries to take over. What would you do?"

Morrow showed his overbite. "We always protect our investments." He let that hang in the air a while, then glanced at the dashboard clock. "How the time flies. Guess I'd better get you back to your office."

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He started the car and swung it in a careful U-turn. His voice took on a didactic tone. "Now, when it comes to making a takeover, there's a slow way and a fast way. The slow way is for your presses to break down, for your deliveries to get sidetracked, for your warehouse to burn down. How long could you keep your customers? How long could you operate at a loss, especially when your insurance company gets tired of paying off, not to say suspicious, and cancels the policies? That's the slow way. I'll let you find out for yourself the fast way."

Morrow dropped Kesten off not at the main entrance but at the Okay Printers' loading dock. His mind too abuzz to wonder much at this, Kesten watched Morrow pull away.

The man had shaken him, all right. First thing to do was get back to his office. In his office, at his desk, he would feel more in control, more himself. It was still the lunch hour—incredibly; it was as though long days and nights of his life had dragged by in the short time of his encounter with Morrow. The overhead door to the shipping department was shut and locked. He would have to walk around to the front.

As he turned to go he found that a van had coasted silently down from farther up the street and now blocked the drive.

He grimaced. It would soon be one o'clock; from one on there'd be supplies coming in and orders going out. This was a florist's van and he knew there were no stationery orders on hand from a florist. He strode to the driver's side. The driver lazed at the wheel, cap over eyes.

Kesten made his voice pleasant. "Mind moving this out of the way? See the No Blocking sign?"

The driver thumbed the cap slightly higher and looked Kesten up and down. "Can't do that just yet."

Kesten stiffened. "What do you mean you can't—"

Without warning, the driver kicked the door open at Kesten. Dodging the vicious swing, Kesten backed into solid flesh. Another man had come up from behind. The driver jumped out. The two beefy copies of each other boxed Kesten in. Kesten's eyes darted, looking for an out. No one was around to see.

He knew it was coming, the proof Morrow's group meant business. He breathed their sickly sweet breaths, heard his own.

The driver spoke without priming his face. The coldly threatening force was all in his voice. "You got a pretty wife, Kesten. We just delivered her some flowers. Be a shame if some crazy nut

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threw acid in her face, wouldn't it?"

Before Kesten could react, the man casually piled it on.

"You got a nice little boy too. That's a neat bike he was riding. Bikes can be awful dangerous. Be a shame if he got in the way of some hit-and-run driver, wouldn't it?" The man raised a shoulder. "And in case you don't get the point—"

The man behind pinned Kesten's arms while the driver without breathing hard sank a hard fist into Kesten's belly. They stepped away from Kesten, letting him double to the ground. The world was as blurry as a highly magnified halftone screen, and Kesten was vaguely aware the van drove away.

Three times Kesten threw up in his office lavatory. He worked by intercom, finding excuses to see no one the rest of the afternoon. But the paleness and the sickness had lessened by the time he left for home.

Home was still there. Billy and Marge were still all right.

Billy, his hair still electric from pulling his sweater off, submitted to a wincing embrace. Kesten thought, *Billy, I don't want you to ride your bike for a while.* But he didn't say the words.

Marge held him off for a second before she returned his kiss. "You look hungry, Orv. Glad you saved your appetite." Kesten thought, *Marge, I don't want you to go out shopping. I don't want you even to answer the door.* But he didn't say the words.

He couldn't keep Marge and Billy under wraps forever or even for long.

Kesten went to the bathroom and sat on the edge of the tub. He stared bleakly at the mirroring surfaces of the room. The swish of the revolving spray watering the lawn filled the silence.

Marge looked in at him. "Aren't you dressed yet?"

"What?" Slack-jawed, he stared at her. She had on her new party dress. This and the fact that she touched perfume to her pulse spots jolted him into remembering they were dining at the Palmers' tonight.

"Dreaming?" She gave him a kiss. "Thanks for this."

She held a corsage ready for pinning, a corsage he had not ordered sent.

He composed himself, pinned it on Marge's gown without sticking either of them. He heard Billy answer the front door and let the sitter in. He hurried to wash up and change.

On the way to the Palmers' he slowed the car, looking for a pay phone.

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"Something the matter with the car, dear?"

"No, I just remembered I have to make a phone call. To a customer." He left out the adjective "rough."

"Can't leave business at the office, can you?" But Marge smiled. She was not like some wives he knew who resented the fact that business was the husband's mistress. What was good for Marge's husband's business was good for Marge. The business gave her a lovely house, a comfortable expense account, and an unclouded future.

Her feeling of security gave him a feeling of security. He was a lucky man.

He spotted a highway phone booth and pulled up. He kissed Marge before he turned to climb out of the car. Some wives might have started and asked, "What's that for?" Marge returned the kiss with warmth.

Inside the booth Kesten drew a slip of paper from his wallet, unfolded it, and dialed the number on it.

A dead-sounding voice answered on the third ring. "Yeah?"

Kesten bypassed a swallow. "A man named Jake told me to call this number if I ever had a real emergency and to ask for Mr. Fixit."

"You got him. What's your problem?"

There was a brief silence after Kesten told his problem, then the dead voice came on again.

"Okay. We'll take care of everything. None of them guys will be around to bother you no more."

The nightmare cloud shadowing Marge and Billy blew away. Kesten's voice overflowed with feeling. "Thanks."

The dead voice sounded mildly surprised. "Thanks? It ain't a matter of thanks. We have to look out for our investments."

"Q"

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"What do you want?" she screamed. He stood there startled and silent . . . a short tale of menace and suspense. . .

THE FOLLOWER

by JANET GRAHAM

"What was that!"

Virginia just managed not to scream, when something huge and furry flew in from the garden and flapped across the darkened porch, brushing her silvery hair with its repulsive wing.

"Only a moth, Mother—don't fuss," said Debbie, swinging languorously in her hammock. "They're big in this country." The creature settled on the whitewashed wall, under the tin roof; it was almost the size of a soup dish.

Everything was indecently big, thought Virginia, here in the tropical Venezuelan outback—razor-sharp grasses taller than a man, vast black scavenging birds wheeling overhead, processions of great malevolent red ants. She shuddered when she remembered the ants: the day before, she had watched as an inexorable army of them converged on a baby rabbit, stung it to death, and dragged it away to their nest.

Only her joy in seeing her daughter Debbie again after two years helped Virginia overcome her feelings of revulsion about the dirty tropical town, the suffocating heat, the inescapable insects, the murderous drivers, the lurking snakes. And there were other dangers: she was the wife of a wealthy automobile executive, and before she left New York to visit South America, jocular friends had warned, "Don't get yourself kidnaped, Virginia!"

But then, if she stayed in New York, she worried constantly about being mugged. Pretty and confident in her youth, she found her thin, angular middle-age had brought a puzzling set of insecurities, made her jumpy, tense, and sleepless. Her husband, Leo, had encouraged her to take this trip to see Debbie: "Do you good," he assured her. "Very relaxing, those *mañana* countries."

Nervous, she seldom went out of the house alone, but waited until Debbie had given the last of the day's English lessons, and had seen her teenage pupils to the door. All morning Virginia

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would sit out on the porch, listening to the raucous cries of the next-door parrot, the startling thud of mangoes on the tin roof, the insistent rhythms of harp, guitar, and maracas on a distant radio; and inside the house, Debbie's painstaking repetition of English phrases: "How are you? I'm fine, thank you. What is your name? My name is José." Debbie was astonishingly patient, for a girl of such quicksilver intelligence.

Then in the afternoons the two of them would walk together in the sweltering, potholed streets, talking, talking, talking, catching up on two years of family news—Debbie's lively, amusing chatter, her English hardly used except in lesson time, bubbling out like a stream long dammed. They talked about Debbie's father, now nearing retirement; about her younger brother, in his last year of college, a language major like Debbie; and about her girl friends (most of them safely married, thought Virginia wistfully, instead of flickering round the world and settling in outlandish places).

It was in the covered market hall that she first noticed the squint-eyed Indian following them, the soles of his woven cotton sandals swishing on the concrete floor as he shuffled close behind them. She turned sharply and glared at him; he slunk away shamefaced, and she thought no more of it, investigating the grotesquely shaped root vegetables and sniffing the pungent, sickly spices.

But ten minutes later, in a mirror hanging on the pottery stall, she caught sight of him again, watching, listening, following. A pickpocket? A kidnaper? She tried to dismiss the thought as hysterical; it was probably Debbie he was after, with her flamboyant blonde hair and her laughter. "Who is that man, darling, do you know?" she asked her. "The tall one with the squint and the torn shirt, over by the dried-fish stall." Debbie glanced at him, and shrugged.

"Well, I wish he'd stop following us. He must have a crush on you." She turned her attention to the pottery, but it was crude and ugly, and the vase she bought for Debbie leaked when they got it home.

Even at night-time the heat stuck and stayed, lingering long after midnight, a tedious unwanted guest. Debbie lent her an electric fan, which swished its head from side to side like a tennis watcher, stirring the air but never cooling it. One night she slept soundly only to jerk awake to the terrifying sound of fists batter-

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ing the doors and windows. But it was only a violent tropical storm, an artillery of raindrops drumming on the roof. Most nights she just lay interminably awake, scratching her mosquito bites until they became infected and needed treatment.

The Indian must have been following them again when they walked to the clinic on the other side of town. Just as they climbed the steps Virginia saw him slipping around to the side street. Luckily the doctor spoke English. "Do you know who that man is, down there?" she asked him, heart pounding, as she pointed out of the window. He was still lurking near the corner.

"I think he's one of the Rodriguez boys," the doctor told her, "from a big family down in the slum quarter. Unemployed of course, like all of them down there. His brother is a brilliant guitar player, and went off to the states last year to play Venezuelan folk music in a night club. You have heard of our music?"

Once he had a name, the follower lost some of his menace. But she was still conscious of him, shuffling behind them on their daily walks; and though Debbie pooh-poohed her talk about kidnapings and urban guerillas, she was still wary, watchful, on edge, especially when she walked alone.

One day as she was about to cross an empty street, a large car drew up and screeched to a stop beside her. Through the side window she saw the gleaming dark glasses of the driver. When he thrust open the door, she gave an involuntary gasp of fear, only to realise that it was the kindly clinic doctor, offering her a lift home.

On the weekends she and Debbie hired a car and drove a little way out of town, down a dirt road swarming with black-eyed, barefoot children, with pigs and chickens and overloaded donkeys. They went to Debbie's favorite swimming place, a shallow river bordered by dense jungly vegetation, tall palms, drooping lianas, and spiky blood-red flowers. Monkeys chattered in the trees overhead; black and yellow birds swooped past and dove into weird hanging nests; morpho butterflies of astonishing iridescent blue glittered up and down the banks.

This river was completely safe to swim in, Debbie assured her—no large alligators, only the tiny "babas" which wouldn't hurt them; and unlike many Venezuelan rivers it was free of the deadly Caribe fish which could eat a fallen boatman alive before his friends could pull him back into the canoe. "Like *Jaws*," exclaimed Virginia.

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Debbie told her, "They say the Caribe fish is one ten-thousandth part of a shark—multiplied ten thousand times."

"Ugh," said Virginia, wondering for the umpteenth time how her darling, city-bred daughter could bear to live in this place.

"Are you *sure* it's safe?" Virginia asked again, dipping one toe into the limpid water and watching the shoals of red-tailed fish dart past her. How could you tell a Caribe fish? How could you tell a kidnaper? But once she was in the water, it was glorious—fresh and sparkling, her skin caressed by the current, her tired feet soothed by smooth stones. Floating on her back, watching the swaying palms against a dazzling sky, Virginia felt herself relaxed for the first time in weeks, perhaps in years.

As Debbie skinny-dipped, her bright hair glistening in the sunshine, Virginia heard a creaking in the undergrowth beside the water's edge. "Somebody's there!" she shouted to Debbie.

"Probably some cattle," said Debbie, "or a jaguar maybe," she added, teasing her mother.

But when Virginia looked into the darkness of the river bank, still half dazzled, peering between the tangled trees, she thought she saw a brown face watching her intently. Shaking, she dove under the water and swam to Debbie. "He's followed us again. He has!" she told her. "How could he *get* out here?"

"Oh, there are buses, I guess," said Debbie vaguely, unconcerned. Virginia felt sick, and longed for home.

She wrote a letter to her husband the next day, more cheerful than she felt. "Debbie seems happy here—she has lots of pupils, more than she can cope with. She even has a waiting list, although she charges $7 an hour! So she's got enough to live on, and plenty of friends (they play marvelous music at parties here). And there's a good doctor, and Debbie's Spanish is fantastic. Even mine is improving."

It was true she was getting almost fluent. Every day she bought the local newspaper and read it in bed the last thing at night, the pages flapped by the fan. But what she read was not encouraging: earthquakes, plane crashes, robberies, drug smuggling. And this week a kidnaping, in the very next town, of a prosperous farmer. (So she wasn't being hysterical to worry about it.) The police had made a few arrests, just for the look of the thing, but there was no evidence and they let the suspects go. Virginia sighed, let the paper fall to the floor, switched off her bedside light, and had another nightmare.

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The next day she and Debbie went out to the market to buy a couple of extra hammocks: Debbie had invited a couple of French friends to stay, teachers from the university town up in the mountains. There was no problem with spare rooms in this climate: you just slung a few more hammocks on your porch; guests would arrive with guitars, toothbrushes, and a crate of beer.

In the market Virginia looked anxiously toward the fish stall but the man wasn't there. They walked along, chattering, hugging the brightly striped hammocks in their arms, then went into a café to drink tall beakers of delicious *patilla,* iced watermelon juice. As they got up to leave, Virginia turned around and there he was at the next table, regarding them fixedly, then hanging his head when he saw that he was noticed.

When they went to put up the hammocks on the porch, they found there were not enough nails in the sturdy timbers. Virginia tried to straighten a bent nail with the heel of a flimsy summer shoe, but it was hopeless. "We'd better go out and buy a hammer and some good big nails," she told Debbie. "We don't want your guests collapsing on the floor."

"Damn, I said I'd be in waiting for them from six o'clock on," Debbie told her. "Do you think you could manage? Hammer is *martillo,* and nails are *clavos,* and the hardware store is in the big square beyond the market. Just turn left past the post office."

Virginia bought the things, got some airmail stamps, and in the post-office litter bin found an unexpected treasure—a week-old copy of *The New York Times.* What could it be doing in this remote place, since she and Debbie were without doubt the only Americans in town? Perhaps some vacationing university student had discarded it.

She had walked less than half a mile, but the heat had exhausted her; still dazed from the disturbed, dream-haunted night, head throbbing, sweat trickling between her legs, she tripped on a loose paving stone and fell. The hammer and nails had been carelessly wrapped, and scattered all over the dusty sidewalk. She scooped them up, maddened that *nothing* worked properly in this country.

She was irritated beyond measure by the mañana mentality, the hour-long waits at the bank counter, the thieving of the mails (half of the packages she sent Debbie hadn't arrived), the anarchic driving, the slovenly streets, the cocooned arrogance of the rich, the sullen defeatism of the poor. She was beginning to hate these

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people (and most of them hated Americans, they made that clear enough).

Still seething, she took her precious newspaper to the shady Plaza Bolivar and sat on a bench under the palm trees, in a quiet corner.

After ten minutes she thought she heard someone breathing. She wheeled round, and he was standing behind her, staring, full of some bitter desire. She clutched her pocketbook, thinking of her travellers cheques. "What do you want?" she screamed. He stood there startled and silent, and she tried to remember her Spanish.

"Why are you following me?" she shouted at him. "*Por que me esta persiguendo?*" His eyes glinted and he stepped forward. Heart pounding, frenzied with fear and rage, she pulled the hammer from its loose wrapping and hurled it at him. It struck him on the temple.

From nowhere, it seemed, a crowd gathered round, shouting and gesticulating, while Virginia cried hysterically, and an officious policeman cleared a way to the fallen man. A trickle of blood came from the Indian's mouth, and he was murmuring something. "What does he say?" she screamed at the policeman, and leaned over the slumped body to catch his panted words.

"*Quise—aprender—Inglès*," he murmured. "I wanted only—listen to you—learn English—to go to my brother."

She sat back and sobbed. The crowd grew noisier and angrier, the shocked mutterings rising to a threatening roar. Two police cars and an ambulance arrived, wailing their sirens like death-heralding banshees.

She had sought to end a nightmare. Now she knew that it had only just begun.

The July 1977 issue of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* will be on sale May 31.

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a *NEW* detective story by
BRIAN GARFIELD

Meet Bill Stoddard whose specialty is industrial security but who is asked, under unusual circumstances, to investigate a possible homicide. The trial began and ended in Colorado—near Quartz City, an old-time boom town that was now a center for tourists and hunters . . . As you read this story you will find deeper and deeper levels of meaning . . .

HUNTING ACCIDENT

by BRIAN GARFIELD

When I arrived in the office Tuesday morning Cord's wife was waiting for me. She didn't rise from the chair. I'd heard the news on the car radio and her grief didn't surprise me but it was mitigated by anger: she was in a rage.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Cord. I just heard."

Her lips kept working and she blinked at me but she held her tongue; perhaps she was afraid of what might come out. Her natural appearance was drab but normally she managed attractive contrivances. This morning there was no makeup. She sat with her shoulders rolled forward and her arms folded as if she had a severe abdominal pain. Now she snarled—a visible exposing of teeth—and afterward she remembered herself, tried an apologetic smile, gathered herself with an obvious effort of will. Her wrath had rendered her quite inarticulate.

I tried to help. "I hope I haven't kept you waiting. I didn't expect—"

"I want you to help me, Bill. I want you to go up there."

Her voice had lost its customary music; it was like a smoker's morning voice—a deep hangover baritone. I stood at my desk unwilling to sit down. "Up where?"

"That place in Colorado. Whatever it's called."

"You'd like me to bring the body back? Of course."

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"Bill, I want you to find out who was responsible." She spoke slowly with effort; the words fell from her with equal weight, like bricks. She said again, clenching a fist, "Responsible."

"The radio said it was an accident."

She watched me with her injured eyes. It rattled me. I said lamely, "My work's industrial security, Mrs. Cord. You seem to be asking me to investigate a homicide. It's a little out of my—"

"You don't like—you didn't like Charlie."

"Mrs. Cord, I—"

"Never mind. I didn't like him very much myself. But he was all I had."

"You need rest," I told her. I sat down behind the desk. "Have you seen a doctor?"

"He gave me a pill. I'll take it when I go home. Bill, you're the only one I trust to do this."

What a sad thing for her to say, I thought. I hardly knew her. She was the wife—the widow—of an acquaintance who'd been an executive in a neighboring department; I hadn't known Charlie Cord very well. She was right—I hadn't liked him, and therefore I'd avoided him when I could. Yet she'd come to me. Hadn't they any friends?

She looked down and saw her fist and unclenched it slowly, studying the fingers as if they were unfamiliar objects. She was waiting for me to speak; she almost cringed. I said, "I'm not sure I understand what you're asking me to do."

"Bill, nobody here cares about Charlie. Good riddance—that's what they'll be thinking. You know the gossip of course."

"Gossip?"

"Why Charlie married me. I've never been what you could call a glamor girl. But my father happens to be a director of the company with sixteen percent of the stock. When Charlie married me, he married sixteen percent of Schiefflin Aerospace and married himself into a forty-thousand-a-year job in the sales and marketing division. Charlie made his way well up in the world from the football team of a second-rate state university. That's what most everybody thinks of Charlie. That's *all* they ever think of him."

"Mrs. Cord, you're upset and that's understandable, but—"

She went on, not allowing me to interrupt further. "He wasn't likeable. He was a boor. He was a hearty backslapper, he was never sincere enough, he told outhouse jokes badly and too loudly. He affected garish jackets and ridiculous cars. He had a fetish for

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big-game hunting. But he did a good job for this company, Bill. People tend to ignore that—deliberately I'm sure, because no one likes to give credit to a person as obnoxious as Charlie. As Charlie was." Then her voice cracked. "He made my life miserable. Intolerable. But he was all I had. Can you understand that?"

"Sure." I tried to look reassuring.

"Bill, I want you to be the instrument of my revenge."

"Revenge? Wait a minute now, Mrs. Cord."

"He was mine and I was his."

"But apparently it was simply an accident."

"Accident? Maybe. He was shot twice." She paused as if to challenge me to contradict her. Then she said, "I've talked to my father. The company will voucher your expenses. There's a plane to Denver at half-past eleven." She stood up. "Find out how he was killed. And why. And who did it."

On the plane I reviewed what she'd told me about the death of Charlie Cord, what I'd already known, and what I'd learned from two brief phone calls to Colorado.

Six days ago Charlie had flown to Denver with his hunting gear, picked up a rental car at Stapleton Airport, and driven into the Rockies to a half-abandoned mining town called Quartz City. In Wild West days it had been a boom town; now it was a center for tourists and hunters.

Charlie had spent the night in a motel and in the morning by prearrangement he'd been picked up by a professional guide employed by Rocky Mountain Game Safaris, Ltd., a commercial hunting outfit. Charlie and the guide, a man named Sam Mallory, had set out into the mountains in a four-wheel-drive truck with provisions and gear enough for ten days. Four days later Mallory returned to Quartz City in the truck with Charlie Cord's corpse in the back. Charlie had been dead, by then, about 24 hours.

According to the sheriff's office, Charlie had been shot twice through the chest by a .30-'06 rifle. Sam Mallory, the guide, professed to know nothing of the event. His deposition, prepared for the pending coroner's inquest, alleged that Mallory had been in the process of setting up camp on a new site to which they'd moved that morning; while Mallory was pitching the tents, he said, Charlie had taken his .303 rifle and climbed a nearby peak to reconnoiter and perhaps bag something for the supper pot.

About an hour after Charlie's departure from camp, Mallory

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heard two rifle shots on the mountain. He thought little of it at the time, assuming Charlie had shot some game animal. When Charlie didn't return within two hours, Mallory assumed Charlie had wounded the animal and gone after it, as any hunter must.

It wasn't until late afternoon—six or seven hours after he'd heard the shots—that Mallory became alarmed. After all, he deposed, Mr. Cord was an experienced hunter and had a compass and canteen with him; there was no reason for concern earlier.

Mallory went up the mountain but darkness fell before he found anything. Through the night he kept the campfire banked high to give Charlie a homing beacon, but Charlie didn't return and at dawn Mallory was back on the mountain tracking Charlie's boot prints; and at about 8:30 in the morning Mallory found him lying where he'd been shot. Mallory had backpacked the body down to the truck and driven straight to the sheriff.

The Sheriff was a towering thin man with weathered blue outdoor eyes and a thatch of black hair; he went by the name of Bob Wilkerson. He poured me a cup of strong coffee to take the chill out of the autumn afternoon.

"Afraid I never met your friend while he was alive. They tell me he was—well, kind of loud." He smiled to take the edge off it.

The coffee was old but hot. "Have you found the rifle that shot him?"

"No. It was an 'ought-six, of course. We recovered both slugs from the body."

"Isn't that unusual?"

"Unusual? No. Why?"

I said, "A powerful rifle like that, wouldn't it tend to punch straight through a man and keep right on going? Or were they hollowpoints that explode on contact?"

He watched me gravely, then something like suspicion entered his face. "No, they weren't hollowpoints. Jacketed slugs—military style. They didn't expand hardly at all. But they were half spent by the time they hit him. That's why they didn't go on through."

"In other words he was shot from a considerable distance."

"Mr. Stoddard, you don't rightly believe a hunter could mistake a man for a buck deer at *close* range, do you?"

"Is that how it happened, then, Sheriff?"

"That's what it looked like to me. He was shot from a range of four hundred yards or better and it was an uphill trajectory.

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Fighting gravity and all, those slugs weren't going too fast when they hit him."

"Both bullets hit him in the chest?"

"Not more than three inches apart. One of them penetrated his heart."

"That's extraordinary shooting, wouldn't you say?"

"Or lucky shooting."

"Two shots within three inches of each other at four hundred yards, uphill?"

Wilkerson's shoulders stirred as if to dismiss it. "Let me lay it out for you, Mr. Stoddard. I just got back here an hour ago myself—spent the day up on that mountain with Sam Mallory. I expect you'll want to talk to him?"

"If you don't mind."

"Surely. Anyhow, we went over the ground up there again. It's pret' near up to timberline, that area. Scrub trees, a lot of rocks, talus slopes, bare ground in patches here and there. You can pick up a track if you know what to look for but it ain't easy."

"And you found the killer's tracks?"

"Yes, sir." He refilled my cup and set the electric coffee pot back on the window sill. With his gangly frame and sharp Adam's apple he looked boyish, but he had to be at least 40. He went on, "The way Sam and I pieced it together, there was some fellow lower down over on the opposite slope, facing the mountain that your friend climbed over. This fellow, whoever he was—well, you've got to figure if he's up there with an 'ought-six rifle, then he's doing the same thing there that Mr. Cord's doing. Hunting. So this hunter looks across and sees Mr. Cord moving through the scrub oaks up there and he thinks it's got to be a deer or maybe an elk or an antelope or a bighorn sheep. Whatever he figures, he takes aim and he lets go two shots."

"What was Charlie wearing?"

"Buff-colored hunting coat. Bright red cap. We've got to assume the hunter didn't see the cap."

"Uh-huh," I said.

"After he fires the two shots, the fellow goes down one mountain and up the other to find out what he shot and whether it's dead."

"You managed to follow his tracks, then?"

"Yes, sir, we saw where he'd come across the canyon there. We saw where he came up to look at Mr. Cord's body. He sat himself

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down a while there. Probably shocked to realize he'd killed a man."

"And then the hunter just walked away?"

"Right back the way he came. We tracked him back to the point where he'd done the shooting from. Used a forked tree for a rifle rest. We found that."

"Where did the tracks go from there?"

"Into a shale slope. Nothing but loose rocks. Acres of them. No way to track the man through there." Wilkerson poured his own coffee, lifted it to blow on it, and watched me over the rim of the cup. "The way I size it up, Mr. Stoddard, this hunter discovered he'd killed a human being by mistake and he sat there all gloomy-like, trying to think. And after a while I expect he must have said to himself, 'Now this here poor man is dead and that's my own stupid fault for sure, but there ain't a thing I can do for him now. If I was to take this body down and admit I was the one that shot him, why the sheriff just naturally he'd put me in jail and I'd go on trial for manslaughter or some damn thing and I could spend the next five years of my life in prison on account of this stupid accident.' "

Wilkerson put his cup down. "You see how it could have been."

"Yes."

"But this Mr. Cord was a valuable man to the big company you work for. I guess they want more evidence than my guesswork. So they've sent you up here to look around."

"I don't want to step on your toes," I said. "I've got no official authority. But Charlie's widow and his father-in-law and the company I work for—yes, they'd like as many answers as we can find."

"I'm happy to help out however I can. But I doubt we'll find much. It ain't the first time we've had this kind of accident with hunters in these mountains and I expect it won't be the last."

"Does it happen often?"

"Sometimes five, six men get injured or killed up there in a single hunting season. We get crowded with hunters up there, you know. Some of them are city people that don't know half as much as they think they know. Just last year we had three Milwaukee men in a party up in those canyons back of Goat Peak, all three of them were found dead at the end of the season. Two of them had been shot with each other's rifles and the third one got shot by some 'ought-six. Wasn't much my office here could do about it

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except file the reports and notify the next of kin. As long as the law allows men to go banging around mountains without so much as a hunting-license test to find out if they can recognize the difference between a human being and a cow, you're going to have accidents."

When I left Wilkerson's office I drove the rent-a-car around to the buildings that housed Rocky Mountain Game Safaris, Ltd. They were weathered barns and sheds; there was a corral with a few horses and a mule. A terse old man in the tackroom told me Sam Mallory had left for the day. The place smelled of leather and manure. The old man gestured with a spade-bit bridle when he directed me to Mallory's house.

I felt as though I were going uselessly through the motions. But I owed it, I supposed, to that sad angry lost woman who'd come to my office and I owed it to Schiefflin Aerospace. The company had lived up to the moral stereotypes that are honored more often by empty lip service: Schiefflin had recovered me from a psychic gutter, reformed a tattered soul, brought me back to a life that seemed worth something after all.

It was a pleasant old frame house on a shady street behind a row of saloons and shops that had been restored for the tourist trade. Sam Mallory surprised me: I must have expected to find a rustic old-timer. He had a broad freckled young face and soft kindly gray eyes and blond hair tied back with an Apache-style headband. He was probably in his late twenties, no more. He had a leggy young wife with a quick intelligent smile; she excused herself to go back through the house toward the wail of a baby.

Mallory knew who I was; obviously Sheriff Wilkerson had briefed him. He offered me a drink and we sat in the front room surrounded by magazines and bookshelves and a few paintings. The only outdoorsman touch was a tall rifle rack in one corner. It held five rifles; they were locked in place with a chain.

He told me a number of things I already knew but I wanted his version. He'd been with Wilkerson when they'd tracked the killer across the canyon. "We didn't find his empties. But then a lot of hunters pick up their brass. Anyhow the sheriff tells me the slugs were fired by an old Springfield. First World War type."

"When I was in the army," I said, "they still issued those to rifle competition teams. It was a hell of an accurate weapon."

"I never saw one in the service myself. We all had M-14's."

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"You were in Vietnam?"

He nodded.

"What outfit?"

"Why? Were you over there?"

"In the C.I.D., yes." I smiled as if to apologize.

"Not a very popular outfit," Sam Mallory observed. "I was just a grunt myself." Then he grinned and put on a hillbilly twang: "Never had much truck with you hifalutin criminal-investigation types." He sounded uncannily like Wilkerson when he did that.

"I didn't like the work much," I confessed.

"Then why are you still doing it?"

I said, "It's the only thing I know how to do well."

He gave me an up-from-under look as if to catch me off guard. "You seem awfully low-key. *Do* you do it well?"

"Usually."

"What have you found out so far?"

"Need to know, Sam?"

"No, I'm just curious. What can you possibly have learned from me, for instance?"

I glanced toward his rifle rack. "For one thing you haven't got a Springfield .30-'06 over there."

"You're acting as though it's a murder case. As if I'm a suspect."

"Everybody is," I said. "What did you think of Charlie Cord?"

"Obnoxious." He didn't hesitate.

"That's the word most people use."

"Well, he liked to kill. You know?"

"You're a hunters' guide. You must see that all the time."

"Not really. I'm a hunter myself but I'm no killer. Not the way Cord was."

"I'm not sure what you mean by that."

"Sometimes I'll track a brown bear through those peaks two-three days and finally we'll stand face to face and I'll aim my rifle at him, and that's that. I hunt bears—to prove a point to myself, I guess—but I've never killed one."

"You mean you don't pull the trigger?"

"What would I do with a dead bear? I'm not a trophy collector and I don't like the taste of bear meat."

"But Charlie—?"

"He'd kill anything that moved. For fun."

"You must get a lot of clients like him."

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"Not many. You'd be surprised. Most hunters have some dignity. And we're still carnivores, aren't we? Biologically there's nothing dishonorable about that. You can't condemn hunters if you eat meat yourself. But I'm talking about hunters. They eat what they kill. They make use of it. They don't just kill it for the fun of killing and leave it there to rot. You want another drink?"

"Not especially, thanks. Tell me, Sam, why'd you take up this line of work?"

"I like to think of myself as a pioneer mountain-man type. It's clean, you know. It keeps me outdoors."

"Clean," I said, "except when you have to go out with somebody like Charlie Cord."

"Aeah." He met my eyes and smiled. "Except then. Look, is this getting us anywhere?"

"Maybe. What was Charlie after? Specifically, what kind of game?"

"He said he wanted a bobcat and a mule deer buck."

"But?"

"He kept asking me about Rocky Mountain Goats."

"They're a protected species, aren't they?"

"What's left of them, yes."

"But he wanted one."

"One or a dozen. I think if he'd seen any goats he'd have killed them, yes."

"How was he with a rifle?"

"Good. Not spectacular, but good enough."

"Is it customary for the guide to stay in camp while the client goes out hunting?"

"Some hunters want you right with them all the time. But it wasn't unusual. He was just scouting around. He said he didn't want to waste his time sitting around watching me set up tents."

I unfolded my county map. "Show me where it happened."

He put his finger on it. "About there."

"Near Goat Peak." I folded it and put it in my pocket. "Anybody live up in that area?"

"It's National Forest. You can't own property up there."

"Sometimes you can lease it. Do you mind answering my question?"

For the first time Mallory looked uncomfortable. It was subtle—I wouldn't have noticed it if I hadn't been waiting for it. A knotted muscle rippled briefly along his jaw; that was all. He

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said, "There's a sourdough who lives in a lean-to up there. Been searching for years—for the mother lode, I guess."

"What's his name?"

"I don't remember."

"Come on, Sam."

He pretended to be thinking, exercising his memory. Then he snapped his fingers. "Collins, that's it. Hugh Collins."

"I don't suppose he's got a phone."

Mallory laughed. "Up there?"

"I'd like to talk to him."

"What for?"

"He lives on Goat Peak. He may have seen someone."

"I doubt it. He lives on the far side of the peak."

"Can you take me up there? I'll pay for it."

"Waste of money."

"I want to talk to him," I said gently. "It'll go a little faster if you'd be willing to guide me."

"Suit yourself. We can leave in the morning."

"Make it ten o'clock. I've got something to do first."

You didn't put two jacketed .30-caliber bullets into a space smaller than a handspan at 400 yards without knowing what you were doing. That was what had stirred up my suspicions at first; it had been followed by improbabilities and too many coincidences.

The town didn't have a library or a newspaper. I had to get the information by phone from Denver. It took more than an hour and I was a few minutes late meeting Mallory. He had an old Dodge Power Wagon—four-wheel-drive, winch, jerrycans, and canteens. A real wilderness rig. When I was a kid in the Southwest I'd known uranium prospectors who'd go out in Power Wagons and live out of them for months at a stretch and that was long before the fad for truck-mounted camper outfits.

We rolled out of town and Mallory put the truck up a steep dirt road through the pines. "Find out anything?" he asked.

I watched him while I spoke. "Seventeen hunters have died in this county in the past six years. Eleven of them in the vicinity of Goat Peak. Nine killed by .30-'06 bullets. Jacketed."

"Not surprising. That's what a lot of hunters carry. And Goat Peak's where most of the hunters go to set up their base camps." But he said it in a tight-lipped way.

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I glanced at the carbine he had clipped to the inside of the door panel by his left knee. "What's that, a .30-30?"

"Right. Saddle gun. For varmints."

"Tell me about Hugh Collins."

"Nice old guy. A gentleman. You'll see for yourself."

I said, "You didn't like it much in 'Nam, did you?"

"Did anybody?"

"Some did. We had to arrest some of them. The ones who learned to enjoy killing. Got so they'd kill anybody—our side or theirs or just neutral."

"Fragging?"

"Those. And others. Some of them just got bloodthirsty. Psychotic. They couldn't stop killing—didn't want to."

He said, "We had one of those in my outfit. One of the other guys fragged him—threw a grenade down his blankets while he was asleep. We never found out which guy did it but we figured he probably saved all our lives." He glanced at me. "It wasn't me."

"No. You never got into that bag, did you?"

Mallory said, "Too scared. And in the end I suppose I developed a respect for life. No, I never got to liking war."

"That wasn't war," I said.

"Shook you up, did it?"

"It was a long time before I got pulled back together. I had to have a lot of help."

He gave me a quick look and his eyes went back to the steep rutted road. "Shrinks? Psychiatrists?"

"Yes. And friends," I said. I opened up to him because it might inspire him to share confidences. "Mostly it was the interrogations that did it to me. The ones we arrested. The way they could talk about committing grisly murders—and laugh about it. I couldn't take it after a while. It was too grotesque. Terrifying. The bizarrre became the commonplace. One day I just started screaming, so they sent me home."

"Rough," Mallory remarked.

I watched his profile. "Charlie Cord liked to frag animals, didn't he, Sam?"

"You could put it that way," he replied, giving nothing away.

"He didn't have much respect for life."

"Not for animal life, at any rate." He turned the wheel with a powerful twist of his shoulders and we went bucking off the road

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up into a meadow that carried us across a rolling slope into a canyon. He put the Power Wagon into four-wheel-drive and we whined up the dry gravel bed of the canyon floor. I was pitched heavily around and tried to brace myself in the seat.

It was past two o'clock when we reached Hugh Collins' lean-to. It was a spartan camp. A coffee pot and a few utensils were near the dead ashes of the campfire—he'd built his fireplace out of rocks. A cased rifle stood propped inside the lean-to. A bedroll, two canteens, a waterproof pouch with several books in it. No one was in sight, but we left the truck there and Mallory led the way through the forest. He was following tracks, although I couldn't discern them.

After a half-hour hike we heard the ring of a hammer against rock and presently we came upon the sourdough. He had a black beard peppered with gray; he wore coveralls and a plaid work shirt; he was short and built heavy through chest and shoulders. His eyes gleamed with an intelligence that seemed almost childishly innocent.

Mallory made introductions. "Mr. Stoddard's investigating the death of Mr. Cord."

"Who?"

"The hunter who got killed the other day over on the far side of the peak."

We hunkered in the shade. Hugh Collins had been whacking away at a rock face with his pointed hammer. I said, "Finding any color?"

"You always find color. Enough for day wages. I pan out a few hundred dollars a month. You wanted to ask about this hunter?"

"Someone shot him. Looking at the map, I thought the man might have come from this direction. I wondered if you might have seen anyone that day."

"What day was that exactly?"

"Sunday."

"Nobody came through this way Sunday."

"You didn't hear a couple of shots that day, then?"

Collins laughed. He showed good teeth. "I hear shots all the time. This time of year these hills are alive with idiot hunters."

An animal limped into sight and approached us hesitantly. It was a hardy-looking little creature; it had only three legs but it managed to hobble along with dignity and even grace.

Collins said, "All right now, Felicity," and snapped his fingers

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and the delicate little creature came to him and nuzzled his hand. Its left foreleg appeared to have been amputated at the shoulder. Collins said, "Felicity's a Rocky Mountain Goat. You don't see many."

"What happened to her leg?"

"That's how we got together, Felicity and I. Seven years ago—she was a yearling—some idiot hunter blew her leg off and I came across her half dead up there on the peak. Bandaged her up, looked after her. She's been with me ever since. Like the lion and Androcles." He scratched the goat's ears. After a moment she hopped away toward the woods. Collins looked up through the pines, evidently judging the angle of the sun. "You gentlemen hungry? Why don't we walk back to my camp?"

He served up a meal of beans and fritters and greens that he must have harvested from the moutain slopes. "Sorry there's no meat. I don't keep any on hand. Don't get many visitors."

"Are you a vegetarian?"

"Going on seven years now."

I said, "You don't talk like a back-country hermit, Mr. Collins."

"Well, I used to be on the faculty at the School of Mines down in Golden." He had an engaging smile. "I'm mainly anti-social. I prefer it up here. Of all the animals I've met, I find man the least appealing." The three-legged goat appeared and Collins fed it the last of his salad.

I'd seen the cased rifle when we'd arrived in camp; it was propped inside the lean-to. Now I walked to it and unzipped the leather case. I was sure before I opened it, but it needed confirmation. The old rifle shone with fresh oil—it was well cared for.

Collins and Mallory hadn't stirred from their places by the fireplace. Collins said in a mild voice, "That's a real old-timer, you know. Dates back to Black Jack Pershing's war."

"I know." I watched Sam Mallory get up and walk toward the Power Wagon. When he opened the door I said, "Leave the carbine there, Sam," and he looked at me—looked at the rifle I held—and closed the truck door with stoic resignation. I said to Collins, "Funny that a vegetarian keeps a rifle around."

"Varmints." He met my gaze guilelessly.

Mallory returned to the fire and sat. I said, "If I had this rifle tested by the crime lab in Denver, do you suppose they'd identify it as the weapon that killed Charlie Cord?"

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I looked at Hugh Collins and then at the three-legged goat. She was curled up by the old man's side. I said, "What was he doing, Mr. Collins? Drawing a bead on Felicity here?"

"No. He was taking aim on a Bighorn Sheep. We've got a little flock of them up here. Seven or eight Bighorn Sheep. They're the last survivors of a multitude."

"How long do you expect to keep getting away with it?"

Sam Mallory said, "Sometimes you can't go by that."

I thought about the misery Charlie Cord had trailed around him. I remembered the face of the woman in my office and I looked at the half-asleep face of Felicity by Hugh Collins' side. I had an image of Charlie and I remembered the passionate happy killers who'd appalled me, sent me screaming toward lunacy; and I saw the calm faces of Collins and Mallory.

I said to Mallory, "You're a hunter who doesn't like to kill. You had to have a reason to work for killers. It was to lead them into this old man's trap, wasn't it? How long have you two known each other?"

"Sam's my nephew," Hugh Collins said. "We didn't see much of each other until he came back from Vietnam. That was his lesson—the way Felicity was mine."

I said to Mallory, "But you still eat meat."

"I'm his nephew and I'm his friend. I'm not his disciple."

Collins said, "Sam never shot any of them. That was me. I'd stalk them and watch them and decide whether they were hunters or criminals."

"Nine hunters in the past six years," I said.

"Eleven. Killers, Mr. Stoddard."

Mallory said, "I've guided hundreds of hunters through here."

Collins said, "You want to mind that trigger. She goes off easy."

I set the safety and put the rifle down against the lean-to and walked to the truck. I looked back at Mallory. "We'd better start back or it'll get dark before we're down off the mountain."

Mallory got to his feet, bewildered. I said, "I'll report that it was a hunting accident."

Collins scratched Felicity's chest and she pawed amiably at him with her one front hoof. Mallory came past me and opened the truck door. "You trust me next to this carbine?"

"Yes."

"Because you want us to trust you?"

"That's right," I said. I went around and got in. When I shut

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the door Mallory started the engine. Collins appeared at the window.

He didn't offer to reach in and shake my hand. But he smiled slightly. "If you change your mind, don't go to Sheriff Wilkerson with what you know. It would put him in a dilemma."

"I assumed he was in on it," I said. "He had to be. Otherwise he'd have compared the ballistics on those various .30-'06 bullets over the years and it would be public knowledge that they were all killed by the same rifle."

"All but two. Last year that was. I started shooting at one of them and the other two panicked and killed each other. Damnedest thing I ever saw."

Mallory had the truck idling. He said, "I still can't say I understand this."

I said, "Let's just say we're fellow veterans of the same war."

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It was Memorial Day, and he had finally finished the last of the three grave markers . . .

THE THREE GRAVE MARKERS

by FRANK SISK

It was Memorial Day, and Leon Schoonmaker had finally finished work on the last of the three wooden grave markers. Each had taken a week, a few hours stolen daily from the endless succession of farm chores; but now as he examined the varnished slabs of hickory with their simple V-gouged inscriptions he felt an artisan's pride in a job well done.

He'd always liked fooling with wood. As a boy he'd carved Lord only knows how many willow whistles and barrel pegs.

"A natural-born whittler, that lad is," Pa used to say, "but I pray God he learns to do a little somethin' else too."

That was a lifetime ago. Pa was long gone and Ma had followed him a few years later. But his older brother Walt had died even before the old folks. Walt would have been a real good farmer too, but he joined the Marines right after Pearl Harbor and landed on Guadalcanal and remained there.

And the farm, once a paying proposition, was faltering toward an inevitable end.

Drought. Two successive years of it.

Aloud, Leon blamed his debts and troubles on the drought, but inside himself he knew he wasn't a true-born farmer. He lacked, unlike Walt, a gut feeling for the soil. He farmed because there seemed to be no other alternative. His father's death had left him mired amid 400 acres of land with the Schoonmaker name on it generation after generation; and so as Walt was fated to stay forever in a tropic swamp, Leon stayed on here.

At first it wasn't bad. He was young and strong. Ma was still around with a misguided faith in him. And hired hands were available during the summer.

Besides, he was beginning to court Lotta Tanner. Lotta was pretty and shapely.

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Yes, that was a lifetime ago . . .

Leon carefully placed the grave markers one by one, face up, in a wheelbarrow. The topmost was Lotta's: *Here Lies Lotta V. Schoonmaker, beloved wife of . . .*

After wheeling the barrow from the workshop, which was a small room partitioned in a corner of the big barn, he locked the door and dropped the key into the hip pocket of his blue bib overalls. Locking the door was an old habit. Not that there was much danger of burglary in this forsaken country. He'd installed the lock to keep Lotta out because she raised such a ruckus whenever he bought a new tool.

"A terrible waste," she called it. "When I think of all the cryin' needs we have—me and young Stan and even you . . ."

Leon trundled the barrow across the hard earthen floor and out through a doorless exit in the side of the barn farthest from the house. The air was oppressively humid. The cloudless sky was a moist blue. The mid-morning sun appeared to shimmer behind a gray veil. It was as if the rain so long withheld had recently passed in flight from horizon to horizon, leaving in its wake a blistering dampness.

Last year, if Leon recalled aright, Memorial Day was cut from the same weather pattern—air almost too thick for a body to breathe. He was sweating like a sawmill mule by the time he reached the family burial ground, a quarter of a mile away. The plot stood in a grove of white birch. It was partially enclosed by remnants of a wrought-iron fence. Flaking black paint exposed brown streaks of rust. Mingling with thistle and bindweed, the tall grass grew unkempt and sun-scorched.

Everything's going to rack and ruin, Leon reflected, and no time left for remedy. Well, later in the cool of the evening, when the main task was done, he'd trim and tidy up this area at least as a gesture to those who had gone so intrepidly before him.

Releasing the barrow handles, he stood dull-eyed for several minutes in contemplation of the headstones, starting with those of his great-grandparents and coming to rest on Walt's cenotaph, a polished cube of black marble four feet high that had cost Pa close to $1500. *In Memoriam of Cpl. Walter M. Schoonmaker, U. S. Marine Corps, born Oct. 6, 1920, died Sept. 14, 1942 in the service of his country on Guadalcanal where his mortal remains now rest forever . . .*

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Leon had married Lotta Tanner six months after his mother's death.

Ma was never one to backbite a person. She spoke her piece once and that was that.

"Heed me, son," she'd said. "Lottie Tanner's a purty little thing but she ain't one to give or share."

Ma had been laid to rest here 18 years ago, but with the passage of time Leon often heard her brief comment on Lotta, on each occasion more clearly, until it finally had the unmistakable ring of gospel truth.

There are female creatures in this world who require a mate only to get issue. That accomplished, they grow indifferent and often inimical to the male. Thus was Lotta. After young Stan was born, she gradually began withdrawing from the net of mindless passion they'd spun together, leaving him awkwardly entangled. It had taken Leon a long time to see the cold reality of his situation through a thousand small rejections, but the day came when he faced it squarely and thereafter he lived with the gnawing torment of utter loneliness.

Lotta had arbitrarily named young Stan after her father, Stanley F. Tanner, whose small grocery store also served as post office in the nearby town of Weir. Over the course of years old Stan's wife died, the post office was closed down and its functions incorporated with a facility in a larger town, and the store withered on the vine. Two years ago an impoverished old Stan came to live on the Schoonmaker farm.

Like his daughter, old Stan was a chronic complainer. The weather rarely suited him. His bones ached. Bugs were singling him out. His cough was killing him. His bed was lumpy. His teeth didn't fit. His son-in-law was bent on running a good farm into bankruptcy.

To this last lament Leon once replied, "I sure as hell value advice from a gent of your background, Stanley."

"I was doin' all right till the damn politicians come along and closed me up," the old man snapped.

Young Stan, tied to his mother's apron strings since birth and growing up sissified, began to ape his grandfather. His complaints differed only in that they were based on an endless list of deprivations: he needed stronger eyeglasses, dress shoes, a special shampoo, a fingernail file, a suede jacket, an ID bracelet, a bookcase . . .

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Leon painstakingly carpentered a four-shelved bookcase from odds and ends of lumber, but the finished product warped badly within six months and was the source of further complaint.

In this dreary old world, seems like, nobody could be satisfied.

Earlier in the year a strep infection had wiped out all his swine. Two months ago one-third of his dairy herd had succumbed to milk fever. He still owed the vet $80.

Then, three weeks ago, came the final blow. He was walking past the Weir Trust Company when Jason Calverton tapped on the window and beckoned him in.

"I realize you've had more than your share of troubles," Jason said after seating Leon beside his desk, "but the directors won't let me carry you any longer."

"Meanin' exactly what, Jason?"

"Meaning this, Leon. You've got to pay up your interest arrears by the end of the month or face foreclosure."

"How much does it come to?"

"Three thousand six hundred and eighty-three dollars and ninety-four cents."

"I couldn't even pay the ninety-four cents, Jason. That's how bad off I am."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Leon. I really am."

Judging by the ghostly sun, it was shortly after noon when Leon returned the empty wheelbarrow to the barn and walked toward the neglected old house.

"Well," exclaimed Lotta as he entered the kitchen, "it's high time. We been waitin' dinner on you for half an hour. It's high time."

"I guess it is," Leon said flatly, going to the hall closet where he kept his shotgun.

"Q"

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PRIZEWINNING STORY

This story, written by a Danish author new to EQMM and probably new to the American public, won second prize in a crime short-story contest run by a Norwegian weekly called "A—Magazine," and sponsored by The Riverton Club of Norway, the Swedish Crime Novel Academy, and the Poe Club of Denmark.

The author, Frits Remar, is a former advertising man, in his early forties, blond, married, has two children, is "recently a teetotaler," and lives in a small community north of Copenhagen. In 1972 one of his books won the prize as the best Danish crime novel of that year.

Mr. Remar's prizewinning short story tells of two young men of the Danish navy who have been assigned to patrolguard duty on the eastern shore of Greenland. The area is so sparsely populated that they rarely meet another person on their 2000-mile trip, which takes about three months from the base to almost the North Pole and back. Patrolguarding can be a lonely and dangerous business. . .

THE PHOTO

by FRITS REMAR

Kurt has behaved strangely this last fortnight. That is, in the daytime there hasn't been any trouble. As usual we have been working by turns, making the usual observations, keeping the log, and so on. But in the night when we had camped and eaten, he would crawl into his sleeping bag, slip a photo out of his pocket, and stare at it, sighing and groaning.

Generally we would chat for a couple of hours, have a game of cards or chess, or try and tune in on some music station on our short-wave radio before going to sleep. But there hasn't been anything like that these past two weeks.

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He thinks I haven't noticed. He mumbles something about being dead-tired and wanting to turn in early. And then, when I have picked up a book and pretend to be reading it, he will take the photo out of the pocket of his shirt and start his adoration.

It's the photograph of a girl, of course. There's nothing unnatural about that. I too have a girl waiting for me at home. But I didn't know that Kurt had a girl. At any rate, he never spoke about one, and now that we have been here for almost one year, there isn't much we don't know about each other.

I have started fearing that he has what we call "the polar tantrum." As far as I know, there have only been a few cases of that up here. And light attacks have been cured by a sensible talk and 12 or 14 hours of sleep after an injection.

I have tried to talk sense to Kurt, but each time it has come to nothing. He has just been grunting or nodding yes or no. I have begun wondering if we should stay over for a couple of days and nights in our next camp, after tomorrow's march.

But how I shall persuade Kurt to accept an injection voluntarily, I don't know. And I don't think I shall be able to give him one forcibly. We are of the same size and strength and have been through the same training of hand-to-hand fighting. So if I start struggling with him inside the tent, it will only take a couple of minutes before everything is broken.

And that won't do. It will be at least two months before we get back to the base, so in order to survive we need every bit of our equipment.

And outside the tent it's no good, either. If I can't get behind him and take him by surprise, I may as well forget it, and the chances of catching him off guard are very small. During such a long trip as ours everything becomes routine, so if I do anything unexpected he will grow suspicious immediately.

The only possibility is to try while he is asleep, for I don't think I alone can persuade him. It would be something quite different, of course, if we were at the base. In the first place, the others would be there to hold him, and then there's the boss who far better than I would be able to bring him to his senses.

Until tomorrow I shall consider it thoroughly, and if he then turns in right after we eat our meal and feed the dogs, I'll stay awake till I'm sure he's asleep. Then I'll knock him out with a blow on the head so that he'll be unconscious when I insert the needle.

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For, even if I give him a double dose, it will take about 15 minutes for the drug to work, and in that quarter of an hour we would have enough time to tear the tent apart.

I cast a sidelong glance at him over the book, which I had in my hands. He lay with his back to me and had stopped sighing. He drew a deep and regular breath. Apparently he was asleep. Should I try it tonight instead? No, this camp isn't good for more than one night's stay. We are too exposed if a storm should arise, and that is something you can never be sure about in these latitudes.

The place we are to reach by tomorrow is a much better site. There we can pitch the tent properly, sheltered by rocks protruding above the ice cap. So we would manage even if it should blow great guns from the north.

Yes, it'll have to wait till tomorrow.

I laid the book aside, then said good night to my girl. She smiled back at me, her red lips slightly apart, the expression in her eyes at once loving and seductive, her black hair showering about her head and shoulders.

The photo of my girl had become badly creased after having been so long in my breast pocket and having been taken out and put back so many times.

When we return to the base I am going to write and ask her to send me a new one. After all, I will be staying up here for another six months. But it will have to be a print exactly like this one, for it is in this pose that I always see her when closing my eyes.

I put the photograph back in my pocket, checked the stove, and turned the kerosene lamp down to low flame before crawling into my bag and falling asleep.

Kurt behaved normally next morning. We had breakfast, fed the dogs, took down the tent, and packed our sled. There was the usual shouting while we hitched up the dogs and got going.

But he didn't fool me. He had the tantrum—of that I was fully convinced—and I was going to give him the injection tonight so that he could become his old self again. Not only for his sake, for mine too.

Once the tantrum was ablaze, he would be completely unbearable and it would be impracticable to be together for another two months. It had to be nipped in the bud—I could not wait any longer.

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We worked our way swiftly across the ice one kilometer offshore. The ice lay unbroken for miles in front of us, and by noon we could dimly see the inland formation of rocks, where we had planned to camp that night.

The afternoon went by uneventfully, but at about four o'clock, when we had started pulling in toward land, something went wrong.

An arctic fox suddenly jumped up about 50 yards in front of our sled. The *baas* started howling and went for it. The other dogs were yelping as well, and in a very few seconds the sled raced off across the ice toward the rocks, and we had totally lost control of the dogs and the sled.

In order to regain warmth I had been running slowly beside the sled after my rest interval, and very soon I was hundreds of yards behind it. Kurt lay clinging to the equipment in order not to fall off the sled, as it swayed from side to side or jumped high up into the air, jolting against outcroppings and out of holes in the far more uneven ground here along the coast.

The hue and cry ended abruptly. The arctic fox disappeared among the rocks, and the sled turned round after colliding with a big boulder. Kurt was hurled into the air and landed heavily on a granite knoll. The lines of the dogs were hopelessly tangled, and the dogs were howling at the top of their lungs, both from disappointment in the interrupted hunt and from the pain of the jerk that had stopped them.

But the dogs would have to wait. So would all the equipment lying scattered about. First I had to attend to Kurt.

He lay unconscious. I took off his fur hood. He was bleeding from a large wound in the back of his head, but as far as I could feel, he hadn't fractured his skull. He must have had a tremendous concussion, however. He was breathing faintly, his pulse slow and irregular.

I groped with my hands along his body on the outside of his clothes to find out if he had broken any bones. When I touched his right thigh just above the knee, he whimpered though still unconscious.

A femoral fracture! Damn!

I cut along the trouser leg to see if it was a compound fracture. It wasn't, but there was no doubt about it being a fracture. The big dark swollen bump on the inside of his leg just above the knee spoke its own silent but distinct language.

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I put him as comfortably as possible in the snow by the side of the boulder and started rummaging for our medicine chest in the mess around the sled. Finding it, I stuck a couple of blankets under my arm and hurried back to him.

First of all I had to secure him against shock or treat him if he'd already had one. When I examined him again, he was breathing more faintly than before, his pulse almost imperceptible and extremely irregular, his face pale and covered with cold sweat, and no doubt his body temperature had lowered.

I wrapped him up in the blankets, so that he wouldn't cool too much before I could get the tent pitched and the stove lit. Then I gave him half a liter of blood plasma, and presently his breathing became deeper and his pulse more rapid and regular.

Next I attended to the wound in the back of his head. It was large, but not too deep. Carefully I dabbed away the dried-up blood, considered for a moment if I should shave off his hair, but gave up the thought, sprinkled on sulfa powder, and affixed a large piece of adhesive plaster.

Now that he wasn't going to die, I could begin pitching the tent. It took more time than usual. First, I was alone, and second, all the equipment was scattered. But at last I had the tent pitched and got the stove going, so that I could get Kurt inside. It was hard dragging him through the snow, and I was glad he was unconscious, for it must have hurt him like hell. In fact, he groaned constantly even though he didn't wake up.

During the next hour I was very busy. I put splints on his leg. I was very careful to make the fracture surfaces fit together, but I didn't know if I had succeeded. Then I gathered the rest of our equipment. I cursed when I discovered that our radio had been smashed. Now we couldn't get in touch with the base. Then I packed the sled with those things we didn't need immediately. And finally I took care of the dogs before re-entering the tent.

It had become tolerably warm in there, and Kurt had got some color back in his cheeks and was now breathing quite normally. And his pulse was stronger.

I didn't care that he was still unconscious, for I had given him an injection before starting to work on his leg. I couldn't help thinking of yesterday's plan to catch him off guard during his sleep to give him an injection to rid him of his tantrum. Now destiny had interfered and done my job. In fact, it had forced me to give him the injection that was to ease his overtaxed mind for

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those ten or twelve hours necessary to bring him out of his polar tantrum.

I prepared some food and wondered if I should have waited to give him the injection till I had squeezed some beef tea into him, but it was too late for that now. It wouldn't harm him not having anything to eat during the next twenty hours, which it was going to take at the most. We had had a solid lunch, and I figured he would wake up around four or five in the morning.

After dinner I started playing solitaire. I examined him every once in a while, felt his pulse, but he was sound asleep, and there was no further danger.

And then curiosity began pulling at me.

The last time I had examined him, one of my hands happened to rest on his breast pocket, and I had felt the photograph rustling under my palm.

For a long time I sat staring out into the air, but curiosity won.

I unbuttoned his breast pocket, took out the photo, and had the shock of my life.

The girl smiled back at me, her red lips slightly apart, the expression in her eyes at once loving and seductive, her black hair showering about her head and shoulders.

It was *my* girl.

Rage and jealousy gushed through me, and for a moment I could see nothing. I fell heavily on my bed, crumpling the photo into a small hard pellet.

My girl and Kurt. A photo exactly like the one I had. How could that possibly have come about? She had never betrayed anything. I hadn't had the slightest suspicion she was in love with anyone but me. And, as I told you, Kurt had never talked about any girl.

No, this had not happened.

I was going to see that it had not happened.

If Kurt disappeared, if Kurt died, she would quickly forget all about him. And I would never mention a single word about my knowing that he, too, had had a print of her picture.

For this had not happened at all.

I went outside the tent and found a big stone. I tested its weight in my hand. Yes, it would do.

Then I re-entered the tent, tore the adhesive plaster off the wound, and hammered the stone against his head, He died without regaining consciousness.

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I stood for a long time breathing heavily before going outside to throw the stone far away into the darkness.

There, now it had not happened.

I bandaged the wound in his head, covered him with the blanket, and quietly lay down to sleep after saying good night to my girl.

Now she was mine again.

All mine.

Next morning I strapped him firmly to the sled and started on the trip home.

About 500 kilometers of patrolling remained to be done, but I was sure that the boss of the Sirius Sled Patrol here in Greenland and of the Naval Command at home in Denmark was not going to wink at that under these circumstances.

One month and a thousand kilometers later I was back at the base.

I made my report calmly, and the boss approved of my line of action. In fact, he commended me for having accomplished the return safely and making all the necessary observations on my way.

Mumbling words of sympathy, my buddies patted my shoulders.

There was a lot of mail waiting for me—among other things, a letter from my girl. So as soon as I could get away, I went to my room.

First I opened the letter from my girl. There was another photograph in it—the same pose. So, in my last letter, I must apparently have asked her for a new one.

She smiled at me. Her red lips were slightly apart, the expression in her eyes loving and seductive, her black hair showering about her head and shoulders.

Only obliquely did my eye catch what was printed in large black type below the photograph.

Nine out of ten movie stars use STAR.
Ruby Delany, too, uses STAR in her daily facial treatment,
because STAR contains . . .

Now she was mine again.

All mine.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Chick Kelly novelet by
S. S. RAFFERTY

Chick Kelly is back—Chick the stand-up comic, Chick the Dick—the breeziest bloodhound in the Big Apple, the slangiest sleuth on the subway circuit . . .

Murder in Chick's own bistro and right before his eyes—a show-biz nostalgia case that took Chick back to Hollywood where things are seldom what they seem . . .

CURTAIN GOING UP, CHICK!

by S. S. *RAFFERTY*

"Will you give your name, address, and occupation, Mr. Kelly?" the D.A. said to me after the bailiff took away the Good Book. I looked over at the jury box, trying to find a face to play to. I've got ten years of one-night stands as a club comic behind me, and I know enough to concentrate on one person in the audience. The only trouble was that my present audience didn't write reviews—they handed out lifetime tickets to the slammer. Curtain going up, Chick! I decided to play to the lady in the print dress.

"Chick Kelly," I said, giving them the address of my pad on East 54th Street. "I own and operate a night club known as 'Chicksville, U.S.A.' on Third Avenue."

"Is that your legal name, Mr. Kelly?" the judge says to me. He looked too young to be on the Superior Court bench. All during the trial he kept clearing up one nit-picking point after another. But I couldn't blame the dude for upstaging. There were enough newsmen in the courtroom to staff six competent dailies. The TV guys even brought in artists to do drawings of the trial, and Judge Haworth was a professional poser.

"Charles Xavier Kelly, your Honor." I said. If I swore I had toes, he'd question how many by making me take off my shoes. He gave me a boyish grin, then sold it to the artists. Some ham.

But why knock him? The murder trial of Jock Millington was

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loaded with hams, mostly because everybody involved was in show biz. Jock was an old-time movie producer who was now a candidate for a number on his shirt because the sovereign State of New York had a feeling that he had poisoned his best friend. I was in the cast because he supposedly did it at the bar of my club in front of my eyes.

"Now, Mr. Kelly," the D.A. said, putting both hands on the jury-box rail, "will you tell us, in your own words, exactly what happened on the afternoon of July 27?"

This guy kills me. Who else's words would I use? What am I supposed to do, hire a couple of gag writers for my testimony? But maybe the D.A. had a point. If I told it to you the way I told it to the twelve just-and-prudents, you would lose all the texture of it, and a few kicks besides. So this is basically what I said, with a few ad libs thrown in.

My joint is one of the few night spots in New York that is open for lunch. I get all types—advertising and broadcast guys, an assortment of gamblers on their way to the track, legit theater people who happened to get up early, and anyone passing through from the Coast or Vegas. Lunch has nothing to do with eating—it's wheeling-and-dealing time.

This little circus goes on from noon through three o'clock, then the birds migrate to their mating grounds and the place is left to the waiters, to Cuz the day bartender, and to whatever drunks happen to be out of work that week.

However, when I strolled in around four o'clock on July 27, the joint looked like Lucey's East. Lucey's used to be a bistro across the street from the Paramount studio back in the Golden Days of Hollywood. Any time of the day or night you could walk into Lucey's and see the cream of motion picture stars, warts and all.

This afternoon the four of them were sitting at the far corner of the bar, having a friendly argument. If each one had brought his Oscars with him, the place would have looked like a temple to the Great God of the Silver Screen. The only one you would recognize—and then only from Late Late Movies on TV—was Roland Biscaine. During the 30's and early 40's, he was big box office, and the Number One American Heart Throb. He was still theatrically handsome, and it was obvious that he did his daily push-ups.

Sitting next to Biscaine was Slim Hager, who broke into the movies as a cowboy and stayed on to write some of the best

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comedies ever put on film. I am a student of this guy's art. To round out these heavy hitters were Jock Millington and DeForrest (Dev) Kister. Millington had been a Boy Wonder producer under Mayer, and Dev Kister was still considered one of the most original directors in the business. In fact, none of them was very active any more, but save your tears because, between them, they owned enough California acreage to qualify for separate admission to the Union.

"Okay," Millington was saying as I took a stool, "let Chick be the judge. Dev says that the best angle shot ever was in 'Shane,' where George Stevens put the camera at ground level and shot the fight scene from under the horses' bellies."

"It was a good shot," I admitted.

"And I say baloney." Dev Kister tapped the bar in mock frustration. "Chick, you aren't old enough to remember the 'Birth of a Nation,' but believe me, Griffith was the ultimate genius with the lens. He had a shot in that picture that even De Mille couldn't match. There they are, the Southern and Northern armies, arrayed for battle, and what does he do—"

"He says, 'Move that regiment a little to the left,' " Millington zings him, and we all break up with the yocks. (It's a true story, and Kister walked right into it.)

"Personally, I think your shot of me dying in the trenches in 'Doomed Patrol' was the best, Dev."

"Yeah, mostly because you were in it, Roland," Slim Hager said, expertly flipping salted peanuts into his mouth. "I never met an actor yet who didn't think that way."

"Please, Slim." Roland goes into some fake pathos. "Don't knock actors. I've seen some of those oaters you made before you convinced the studio you could spell. My God, hayseed in the hair, spitting tobacco juice. No wonder you ended up kissing the horse."

Slim chuckled and ran his hand through his silver-blond hair. "Hey, remember the time Millington chartered a ship for shooting 'Hawaiian Sunset,' and we sailed all over the Pacific trying to find sun? Let's have another setup all around, Cuz."

"Certainly, Mr. Hager," Old Faithful said, and hopped to it.

Roland started to reminisce about "Hawaiian Sunset" and told us that he had met a lovely morsel on that picture. Roland has had seven wives, which left him open to more sarcasm. Among the five of us the alimony payments would feed all Peru for a generation.

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Cuz set up the drinks, and I could see that this was going to be a heavy session. But what the hell, it was a good session. Hollywood has produced so many broken people and sad stories that it warmed the cockles of your heart, whatever they are, to sit and rap with four professional wiseguys who had a buck and a sense of humor.

"The only morsel I remember on 'Hawaiian Sunset' was Mona Verne," Hager was saying, and then he turned his head and said, "Whahoo, lookie here!"

And she *was* a "lookie here" type. She was an 8x10 glossy walking around in a white halter dress and black picture hat. Her skin was lightly tanned, as if the sun had given her just enough kiss to make her glow.

We all turned and gaped.

"A seat, Madam." Roland Biscaine got into character, getting up and offering his.

"I just want change for the parking meter," she smiled.

"No change without a purchase," I put her on. "Sit down. Mr. Biscaine isn't always so gallant."

"Seriously, gentlemen, I don't want to get a ticket."

"Chick will fix it," Dev Kister reassured her.

But she wasn't having any of our jazz, so, while we were all digging in our pockets, Cuz played hero and gave her a dime for the meter and we all did a fade focus on her as she walked out.

"Thank the Lord I'm an old man," Slim Hager moaned, shaking his head. "They still make 'em pretty, don't they? Can you imagine a dish like that refusing our homage thirty years ago?"

"Some did even then, Slim." Dev sipped his drink and smiled. Then the smile froze on his face as he clutched his chest and coughed. He tumbled forward on the bar in a spasm, and I yelled to Cuz, "911, quick," and beat it back to the office where we keep a portable oxygen bottle. I've had people do the big thrombo number in my place before.

But it wasn't a heart attack. According to the Medical Examiner later, it was murder. Someone had turned Dev Kister's Perfect Manhattan into a pluperfect slug of poison.

For a while the lieutenant in charge, Donald Bullethead Jaffee, had worked overtime trying to hang it on Cuz. He was the only one who had handled the drink besides Dev himself. When Jaffee couldn't come up with a motive for Cuz, he started working on Roland, Slim, Jock, and me. Millington got the cigar on two

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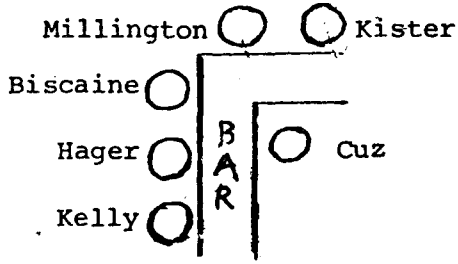
counts. He was sitting next to Kister, and he owed the dead man half a million bucks.

Off to the side in the courtroom was a large diagram of the bar corner which the D.A. had used earlier to show that it was physically impossible for Biscaine, Hager, or myself to drop a pill in Kister's drink.



He even put the architect who designed my joint on the stand and had him recite all the dimensions.

Next in the Prosecution Parade was a little weasel type who told us that his name was Milton Zicker and that he was God's gift to high finance. He was also pretty good at hammering Millington's cell door shut.

Zicker and the D.A. played mutual admiration society for a while and then Zicker told us about how he handled Dev Kister's financial dealings and had discovered that Millington had borrowed half a million for the development of a new color process for films.

"This was untenable," Zicker said, adjusting his glasses, "because they were personal loans, bound only by a series of simple I.O.U.s. No wonder these Hollywood people lose their money. It's untenable."

"Can you tell us why you felt this way, Mr. Zicker?" the D.A. asked.

"I investigated Mr. Millington's progress on the new process and, from what I learned, it was a bad investment with little chance of success. I suggested to Mr. Kister that he consolidate the loans and write them off as a bad debt against next year's taxes."

"Did he do this?"

"He said he would think about it. Millington was upset because

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such a large write-off would probably get into the Tax Courts, and, of course, the press. Millington claimed that publicity on his default of the loans would destroy his bank relationships, which I understand are shaky, at best."

I was thinking to myself, so big deal. Even if Dev was dead, the estate would write off the loan anyway. Then Zicker dropped the bomb.

"Are the loans still collectable, Mr. Zicker?" The D.A. turned to the jury as he said it. He knew what was coming, and he wanted to get the jury's reaction. He got one all right.

"No, they are not," Zicker continued, "because they are canceled by the terms of Mr. Kister's will."

The D.A. asked him to explain.

"Years ago it was a common practice among movie people to include a cancellation-of-debt clause in their wills. It was intended to protect any down-and-outer who might have borrowed a couple of hundred dollars from being harassed, but certainly not the large sum owed by Mr. Millington. But experts in probate law tell me that the debt forgiveness clause is binding on the Millington loan."

I looked over at Ted Summers, the lawyer I had got for Jock. He looked as if someone had just pulled his plug. Ted's a good trial man, but only when a client gives him all the facts. Jock hadn't mentioned the forgiveness clause. All during the trial Ted had been making petty objections on the basis of form, and when the judge overruled them, he would take exception for the record. He was not trying to impress the jury. He was thinking about the appeal after Jock was convicted, and Zicker's testimony seemed to have buttoned it up.

"Was the defendant aware of the clause's existence, Mr. Zicker?" The D.A. looked serious, but inside I knew he was grinning like a pitcher going into the ninth with a ten-run lead.

"As I understand it, when the will was originally drawn, it was read aloud by Mr. Kister at a Hollywood party. These movie people can be a bit bizarre at times. Mr. Millington was present."

"Your witness," the D.A. said to Ted, and I was surprised to see Ted on his feet. The way he had failed to take the other witness on cross, I was beginning to think he had been absent the day they covered it at Harvard Law. Ted walked slowly to the center of the courtroom and stood there, silently looking at Zicker.

Next to good comics, I like to watch lawyers work. Ted would

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have an Academy Award by now if he had gone into show business, but this little playlet looked doomed to a first-night closing. Ted told me once that there are four things to watch for when taking a witness on cross: hesitation, inconsistency, evasion, and stupidity. Zicker didn't look like a good prospect on any of them.

"Were you present when the will was read, Mr. Zicker?"

He got a "No" and a shot at a hearsay dig, but the D.A. countered that with a bunch of affidavits from people who had been there.

Nice try, Teddy. Strike one.

"Now, Mr. Zicker, you said that the will was read when it was originally drawn. Was it ever changed at any time?"

Zicker gave us a smirk. "Well, I should say so. Mr. Kister had been divorced several times, and it was changed to accommodate the new wives."

"And delete the outgoing party?"

It got a laugh, and Zicker said, "Not in all cases. Mr. Kister was a generous man. Three ex-wives are named in the will. Two are deceased. Their portions will fall to the third, Sally Trent."

The courtroom started to mutter and buzz. Sally Trent was a perky little dancer who tapped her way through a flock of musicals in the early forties. The characters in this trial sounded like the files in central casting.

"Miss Trent was his last wife?"

"No, his last wife was killed in an auto accident in Cannes last winter. Mr. Kister was almost killed himself, and spent two months in a hospital."

Zicker was careful not to mention that Dev Kister had been accused of being a drunk driver by the local gendarmes, but why speak ill of the dead? It wouldn't help Millington anyway.

"Mr. Zicker, can you tell us who else is mentioned in the will besides Miss Trent?"

He told him no one except an old couple who took care of his house at Big Sur. "They receive a small annuity," he said. "The balance goes to Miss Trent."

The court, even the judge, sat up when Zicker told us how much the estate was worth. Five-million green ones would make anyone sit up.

Ted began to troll in shallow waters. "How much alimony did Miss Trent receive at the time of the divorce?"

"She didn't receive any."

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"She waived it?"

"Yes, you might say that."

I agreed with the D.A. when he said that he couldn't see where that had any bearing on the case. Ted and the D.A. had at it with the verbal broadswords, and the judge told Teddy to get to the point.

"Mr. Zicker," Ted asked, "was the divorce amicable?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"A man like you, so close to the decedent, and yet you don't know if the divorce was amicable? Come now, Mr. Zicker. Who was the plaintiff in the action?"

"I—er—"

"Was it Mr. Kister? It would be a part of the court record."

"He brought the suit."

"This was in New York State?"

"Yes."

"Over ten years ago?"

"Yes."

"Then she didn't waive alimony, did she? She wasn't entitled to it. She was sued on the only grounds available in New York at that time—adultery."

Zicker squirmed a little on the stand. "As you know, Mr. Summers, many of these cases had no bearing on adultery at all."

"Who was the correspondent?"

"It was a John Doe proceeding."

This gave the judge a chance to show us all how bright he was. He explained to the jury that a John Doe suit allowed the corespondent to remain anonymous if both sides agreed to it.

Ted thought he had a bite. "Who was the John Doe, Mr. Zicker?"

Zicker looked up at the judge, but didn't get any help. He was told this was a murder case, and if he knew the name he should give it.

"The John Doe was Roland Biscaine," Zicker said. The ensuing havoc in the courtroom gave the judge a chance to play anvil chorus with his gavel. Then he adjourned the trial for the day, over the D.A.'s protests.

"Of course, Chick," Ted said, cutting into a steak at dinner later at my club, "it doesn't mean a thing. It's just a smokescreen to confuse the jury. I didn't think the judge would let me go that far. Do you know that only about two percent of all judges have

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criminal trial experience? Zicker could have said the corespondent was Donald Duck if he had wanted to. It's just lucky he came up with a person involved in the trial. The District Attorney will have to work like the devil to clear up this confusion. I wish we could tie you and Hager into the picture too. That would be lovely."

"If Kister had a daughter, I could confess to seducing her, and have the jury think I knocked him off to avoid a shotgun wedding."

"Go ahead. It would help. Seriously, Chick, I really think we're cooked. If we could only have found the girl in the halter dress."

It would have been easier to locate Judge Crater. The police couldn't find her, and neither could four private eyes. Ted had a theory that made some sense. None of us at the bar was looking at any of the others when the poison was put in Dev's drink. Ted figured that the girl had had a full view of all of us, and she might have seen what happened.

"Actually, Millington put it more succinctly," Ted said, still working the steak. "He's an interesting man. He was telling me that the death scene in the bar was the same as a motion picture. Do you know, Chick, that movies don't move? What your eyes are really seeing is twenty-four still pictures per second. It's an illusion."

"It's called persistence of vision, Ted. I see what Jock is driving at, though. If we could freeze that one frame in which the poison was put into the drink, we'd be in Fat City. But maybe the phantom lady saw the wrong thing—like Jock popping the pill into Dev's booze."

"If she did, then he's guilty, and that's that. But I've handled over thirty murder cases, pal, and I can tell you that Millington is innocent. You get a feeling about these things."

"So what's the answer? If it was physically impossible for me or Hager or Lover Biscaine to do it, we dump it back on Cuz, which is laughable."

"Or Kister himself."

"Suicide?"

"It's the only way to go. We need a shadow-of-a-doubt peg and that's it."

"Teddy, guys with five million smackers don't commit suicide."

"Baloney. We have to come up with some evidence that shows Kister was depressed or unstable. Anything to build that doubt."

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"Why didn't you ask Zicker when you had him on the run?"

"Chick, he's so loyal to Kister, he'd have painted a picture of health and vitality."

"Dev was happy enough that afternoon."

"Since when are you a shrink? But you can help, Chick."

"Outside of probably getting stuck with your fee, I don't see how."

"You know show business, the people, the places. They'll open up to you faster than a private dick. If we can show Kister had emotional trouble, we have a wedge."

And that, boys and girls, is how I won my second trip to Hollywood. The first was when I went out to Tinsel Town 50,000 years ago to appear in a sci-fi turkey in which the monster got all the laughs.

There is a booth in the Polo Lounge at the Beverly Hills Hotel that could be mistaken for a Delphic Cave. Instead of an oracle, however, you'll find a rememberacle. Trixie Durkin lives on gin and grapefruit juice and canapés. She knows more about Hollywood than the F.B.I. does about the mob. She weighs about 300 pounds stripped and should be forced to wear a sign that says, "Beware, She Bites."

"Well, if it isn't li'l ol' Chick Kelly," she says to me in a tone that sounds like her voice box has been in collision with a truck marked San Mateo Sand & Gravel Company. "How's the gin-mill business, bubbala?"

"Middlin', Trix. You read about the Millington trial?"

"Big Apple doings don't filter through. Maybe I'll come back East for the hanging, though."

"We don't hang 'em any more, Trix. We make them sit in a room and force them to read old Hedda Hopper columns." Believe me, this kid knows his way to a lady's heart, even if he has to go through six feet of blubber. Trixie was a studio flack and then a local gossip columnist, but she never made the national circuit and loves to hear the old competition knocked. She smiled and touched my cheek.

"You got a bum deal out here, baby," she said, taking another canapé. "Sorry about the 'hanging' gag. I always liked Jock Millington."

"Yeah, he's a nice guy, but so was Kister."

She looked at me and almost choked on her caviar. "Chick,

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darling, if Dev Kister had been poisoned in *this* bar, the only people who wouldn't be suspect are me and the Bishop of Los Angeles."

"So there are no nice guys in Hollywood. I didn't know Dev very well, just once-in-a-while drinking buddies. What was he like in the old days?"

"As a director? One of the best, but off the lot, a real stinker. Ask anyone."

"I'm asking. Do you know if he ever went off the deep end, like seeing how many sleeping pills he could eat?"

"That's a laugh. Don't you know rats don't commit suicide? Only lemmings."

Dev Kister was sounding saner and healthier by the minute. I took the artist's sketch of the girl in white from my pocket and showed it to her.

"My God," she said, "are the Forties styles in again in New York? Tacky, tacky. I'll bet that's a copy of a Lorry Chan that someone knocked off."

I asked her who Lorry Chan was and got a lesson in cinematic history, Costume Design Division. Trixie was sure it was one of her costumes. As I looked at the sketch and visualized the girl that day in the bar, it hit me that she did look as if she had stepped out of a 1940's movie. I left Trixie to her grapefruit and gin and headed for an address she gave me.

From the name I figured Lorry Chan was an Oriental, and I was expecting one of those stately, ageless Dragon Ladies. What's in a name? She was very French and as plump as a Parisienne pullet, chain-smoking cigarettes as fast as she talked.

"*Oui*, Trixie never forgets. Let me see—ah, 'Hawaiian Sunset,' yes. The girl on the Captain's bridge wore it. White linen with the darts just so. The director wanted her to be—ah—*tres poitrine*."

At first she couldn't remember the name of the girl who wore the dress, but she dug out a scrapbook of all the pictures she had worked on and pointed her out. The girl in the picture was the same girl who had walked into the bar, yet the picture was taken over 30 years ago!

"She was just a starlet, but the director wanted her to look like a leading lady," Mme. Chan said, starting up another butt.

"And the director was Dev Kister," I said. I asked her if I could take the picture and she gave me ten-times-ten hard times. When I told her it could help Jock Millington, she acquiesced. I'm not

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getting fancy with the language. French ladies "acquiesce." They never give in. If she had asked me how the photo would help, I would have been stuck. I hadn't the slightest idea.

On my way back to town I was doing a heavy think number. The logical place to start was the files of Central Casting at Kister's studio. That was out. Like most of the studios it was closed, and who would keep thirty-year-old pictures of starlets on file anyway? Bango. Light-bulb time. I called the Polo Lounge from a tacos palace and got Trixie on the line. No, she didn't know of any starlet on "Hawaiian Sunset" that had been getting the Kister treatment, but she did answer question Number Two.

"The last casting head at Kister's old studio? Wait a sec, Chick, there must be someone here who knows."

She was back on with a name and an address and some advice: "She's seventy if she's a day, Chick, but the sight of trousers still unnerves her."

If I ever get Millington off the hook, he owes me a favor. To pay me off he has to wrestle a tiger. Dolly Kirkland wears more makeup than a battleship at war. To complete that sea-going simile, she clutched at people as if she were going down for the third time. That afternoon I was playing the people part.

"How lusciously quaint, calling a vodka and tonic with no lime a VTNL. It's very virile." She insisted I join her on the patio, where she sat next to me, wearing out the sleeve of my jacket. "Of course I have all the old back files. Did you think I was going to let them burn my babies? Would you like to take a swim?"

I told her no, I didn't know how, which got me nowhere, because she wanted to know if I would "go for a wade." I turned down the wade too. I was smart enough not to say I didn't have a bathing suit. Dumb this fella ain't. After two drinks I got her down to business, and she takes a look at the photo.

"No, but you said 'starlet,' and there were thousands of them over the years."

"Suppose I narrow it down to 'Hawaiian Sunset' in the forties?"

"Oh, you goose, why didn't you say that right away? She would be in the cast log." She clopped off somewhere, leaving me downwind from all the Chanel #9 money can buy, and came back toodle-oohing with a leather-bound book.

"Of course, Mona Verne. It must be. Now I can cross-reference it in the head sheets."

The girl in Lorry Chan's costume photo and the Central Casting

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photo matched. The trick of the week was to escape Dolly. To hell with one tiger, Millington will have to wrestle two now. And one of them is going to have dyed blonde hair and wear gold lamé toreador pants to make it even with my ordeal.

The Screen Actors Guild, of which I am a member, represents everyone who steps in front of a camera, and I was hoping Mona Verne had kept on paying her dues. She did up until last year. Reason—deceased.

Her last address was down near Playa del Rey, which means I'm covering more miles than a Diners Club bill collector, but I wanted a look anyway.

The house was on a back street and had a scruffy lawn and a bunch of bushes around the porch. Don't ask me what kind. What do I know from bushes? The front door was one of those aluminum grille things, and I could see into the living room. The place was neat, but worn and dingy. I rang the bell twice and got no answer. But the door plate said VERNE, so I kept ringing. A woman's voice sounded from the side of the house, and I walked across the lawn toward it.

She was lying on an army blanket, and must have been snoozing in the sun. She looked as golden lying there in a bikini as she had six weeks before in my bar. Better.

The sun was in her eyes, and she shielded them with her hand. "Yes? Can I help you?" she asked sleepily.

"You sure can, Miss Verne."

She sat upright and put on sunglasses. "Well!" she said.

"Miss Mona Verne?"

"No, I'm Cathy Verne. My mother is dead. Are you from the Beach Commission?"

She would put on the damn sunglasses. Now I couldn't tell if she really didn't recognize me or was faking it.

"No, I came out to collect the dime you borrowed six weeks ago in New York."

"Mister, I don't know what your game is," she said, getting to her feet, "and I frankly don't know what you're talking about."

"Cathy, baby, your mama should have given you acting lessons, and God should have given you more sense. There were six people who saw you in my bistro, but only five of them can swear to it because one of them died. You're a beauty, a honey bear, but the sight of you didn't kill him."

I don't know what the nautical term is for sails that have just

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lost their wind, but Cathy Verne was illustrating it for me. Her arms slumped to her sides. "Let's go inside, Mr. Kelly," she said.

She sat on the sofa sipping orange juice and staring at the glass. She had that look on her face that women get when they are making up their minds.

I had tried to help her along by pointing out that the State of New York would have her brought back as a material witness, so what was the use of stalling.

"I can't see that," she said finally. "I'm not a witness to anything. I walked into your place and asked for change and then walked out. Why drag me into it?"

"Because your mother knew the dead man very well years ago. You were also wearing the same dress, or a copy of a dress, he had made for her."

"So what? Oh, all right, I was wearing my mother's dress and hat. That's not a crime. I've read about the trial, and if you remember, I wasn't within five feet of Mr. Kister."

"Baby, I didn't say you poisoned him. We just want to know what you saw." That was a lie because Ted Summers would ask a lot more when he got her on the stand. I looked at my watch; it was past five o'clock in New York, and I was anxious to check in with Ted. She said yes, I could make a collect call.

"Verne," Ted said, when I gave him all I had. "Wait a minute."

I could hear a lot of paper shuffling. "What's up, Ted?"

"I'm looking back through the testimony. Sure—Verne. It's in your testimony. Mona Verne."

"She's dead. This is the daughter."

"Shut up and listen, Chick. You said that Slim Hager said he met Mona Verne when 'Hawaiian Sunset' was being made."

"So?"

"Inconsistencies, Chick. Hager was a cowboy star, so what was he doing in a South Seas picture? More important, why does he bring up the name of an insignificant starlet thirty years later?"

"Sounds nuts to me, Ted. First off, this was a plush location junket, on a boat, a nice big boat. So a lot of people not in the film but under contract to the studio went along to freeload. It's simple enough."

"Oh, I didn't know they operated that way. Chick, I'd like to keep this girl undercover for a few days. Will she come East of her own accord? I'd rather she'd be our witness than the D.A.'s. Did she say she saw anything in the bar?"

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"Negative."

"Well, at first they don't remember. But when you ask them enough questions, you can sometimes spark it back. Don't come back till Thursday. Keep in touch."

"Hey, Ted, how's the trial going?"

"The D.A. put Roland Biscaine on the stand to pooh-pooh the John Doe divorce disclosure. I got him on cross. He admits he has been in the company of the ex-Mrs. Kister—like ten days last winter in Acapulco."

"If you keep it up, you'll have old Roland getting a trial of his own."

"It's just doubt-casting, Chick. We're still stuck with the opportunity problem. No soap on the Kister mental history?"

"He had a little Ghengis Khan in him, but he had all his buttons."

"Keep trying."

Well, I had two days of guard-dog duty ahead of me and the subject was roses. On our way to the beach for a swim, I picked up a bunch of things for a hot-dog roast. If any of my friends saw me romping in the surf with Cathy and broiling meat over an open fire, they'd get the bends. But I was having a great time, despite all the fresh air.

We were lying there watching the moon yawn up out of the Pacific and talking about how she had never traveled out of the country and would like to someday when she got that "I'm thinking" look again.

"Chick, suppose, just suppose, I said I did see Jock Millington put something in Kister's drink."

"He'd get a lifetime guarantee that he would never have to walk our streets again."

"And if I said I didn't?"

"Then you didn't. But either way, the fact that your mother knew Kister may be important. Why don't we leave it to Ted Summers? He calls the plays."

"But I can't just leave it. My testimony is worthless."

"How come?"

"Because—because DeForrest Kister was my father."

After that little bomb she opened up her beach bag and handed me a letter.

"My mother didn't leave me much, but at least she left me the truth. She must have written this the night she died. I was in

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Portland on a modeling job. I hated myself for being away when she died, and more so because I couldn't ask her questions about him. Well, read it." I did.

"Dearest Cathy:

"I was going to take this to my grave, but it would be cowardly. I have always sensed that you never believed me when I told you that your father died in the war, but I thought it best at the time. Now that I am going before God, I can't take a lie with me. Your father is DeForrest Kister.

"You've heard the name, you've seen him on TV. I don't want you to hate him for what I'm going to tell you. Please, Cathy, understand that he was a famous director and still is, but things were different in a movie studio in those days.

"I met your father when he was directing a picture aboard a ship. It was one of those secret romances that ended up in a secret marriage in a God-knows-where Mexican fishing village. Imagine the inanity of filming a picture called 'Hawaiian Sunset' off the coast of Mexico—it gives you an idea of how wild everything was.

"When we all came back to California, I didn't see him for two weeks, and when I called, he was brusque and distant. Three weeks later he had the marriage annulled. I was bitter, hurt, and felt like a casting-couch hussy. A month later I learned you were on the way, and I was desperate and frightened.

"I knew other girls who had tried to take legal action against someone in a big studio, but those studio lawyers were terrors. I got in touch with him and he was very cruel and accused me of horrid things. You are his child, Cathy, and I swear this on my deathbed. He sent me $10,000 and that was the last I heard from him. That money helped raise you and I am proud of myself that you turned out so well . . . so beautiful. I forgive your father, darling, because I must. And I love you. Mother."

"I always had doubts about the your-father-is-dead story," she said when the tears had stopped. "The suspicion that you're illegitimate is always there. I wondered why we used my mother's maiden name, and she said it was for professional reasons. It was a weak excuse, because she was never in another movie. She worked as a secretary for an oil company in Inglewood.

"With my mother dead, I was all alone, and I thought no matter how badly he had treated my mother, DeForrest Kister was still my father. That may be difficult to understand, but it was the way I felt. All those years of wondering who he was, what he

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looked like, would he like me if he got to know me. Six weeks ago I decided to go to New York and see him. Believe me, Chick, it took courage. Rejection is something I can't take."

I asked her, "Why the costume get-up?"

She laughed a little. "Childish as it may seem, I wanted him to see me as my mother, hoping it would rekindle any love he had had for her. Mother and I were very much alike, you know. When I was in my teens, we could pass for sisters.

"I went to New York and called his office, and they said he was having lunch at your place. It was so late I thought I would miss him. But you were all there at the bar. I guess I lost my nerve, and when Mr. Hager started to ogle me and you all looked at me, I said the first thing that came to mind—needing the change for the parking meter. I left because I knew the costume was silly and I was going to call my father like an adult that evening.

"When I saw the papers, I flew back here. Now how can I walk into court and say that I saw a man kill my father and have anyone believe it? They'll think it's revenge."

"Cathy, did you see Millington do it?"

"No, honestly, Chick, I didn't. Later, back at the house, I thought I would say it because it looks as if he's guilty. But I can't."

"Do you have a copy of the wedding license?"

"Yes, of course. I found a Xerox copy in my mother's papers. She wouldn't part with it. I have it, Chick. Don't you believe me?"

"What I believe doesn't matter, baby doll. It's what the New York Surrogate Court believes. Cathy, you're a five-million-dollar heiress, and you can do all the traveling you want to."

Heiress or not, I paid her air fare back to New York on Thursday night. Ted met us at Kennedy and said he wanted to stash her at his brother's house in White Plains. I declined the invitation to join them and opted for my own pad. The club could run itself—sea, sand, and surf had bushed me.

While Cathy waited in the car, I parleyed with Ted and sketched him in.

"I have a scenario for you, Theodore. Suppose Kister saw the girl and was gripped with fear, like he was seeing a ghost—"

He gave me a disgusted look and said, "Go get some rest, pal, you need it. We've got another wrinkle in the prune while you were away. It seems Slim Hager owed Kister money too. Not much, thirty thou, but it keeps things churning for the jury.

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Biscaine is cozy with Sally Trent, who inherits five million, which helps. Finding the girl is the clinker for the suicide pitch."

"So he *was* gripped with fear."

"No, Chick. But if she were seeing her father in the flesh for the first time, it's reasonable for her to have had eyes only for him. She says she didn't see anything, so we hammer home the possibility that Kister put the poison in his own drink as Cuz handed it to him. It would look like he was toying with the cherry in his Manhattan."

"But why, Ted?"

"I don't have to show why. There is a hint that Kister was responsible for his last wife's death in the auto accident in France. We can suggest depression, guilt. It's a squeaker, Chick, but I think we'll make it with the girl's testimony."

I went home, but since I own my own restaurant it is obvious that my apartment's fridge is always empty. Maggie, my cleaning lady, left me a surprise, however—a plate of purple grapes and a six-pack of beer. Which gives you an idea of her dietary habits. I clicked on the TV and started unpacking.

Ted had said squeaker, and that was too dicey for me. I wanted better odds for Millington, and this suicide jazz was a weak morning line. I tossed a polo shirt on the dresser and noticed that I hadn't given Cathy back her copy of the marriage certificate. I've got to take that girl in hand; this piece of paper is her ticket to millions, and she just casually tosses it around.

I sat down in front of the tube, where Pat O'Brien and Randy Scott were hammering it up in a WW II recruitment flick about bombardiers. Grapes and beer might be okay if the grapes had been in fermented liquid form, but this way they just didn't match. I had the marriage certificate in my hand and wondered where Boca de Apiza was in Mexico. When I marrried my heiress, it would be a nice touch to tie the knot in the same town in which her mama and papa had their brief interlude.

I wasn't really serious about marrying Cathy, but I love to hype myself. In fact, I was the only one in the deal who would get nothing from Dev Kister's death. I don't know how the law works, but I guess Sally Trent would get some coin in a settlement, and that made Romantic Roland a prince consort. Millington would be solvent, Cathy would be rich, and even Slim Hager got out of a 30G debt. Hell, I was the one who got stuck: no one had paid the bar bill that afternoon.

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I'm chewing grapes and nodding off to Pat and Randy when bango! I almost choked on a grape. Believe me, I sat bolt upright and made for the phone and Ted Summers. I had just put out a better morning line on Millington odds.

As he sat at one of the tables in the lounge at my joint, the judge looked even younger and would have had to show me proof of age if it were regular business hours. But it was only ten the next morning, and neither he nor the jury that took seats around the lounge nor the D.A. looked like morning tipplers. Those of us at the bar, however, made it as realistic as possible. Cuz was mixing a round as he had that fatal afternoon; Biscaine, Hager, and Millington were in their same seats.

It had taken Ted plenty of palaver to convince the judge that a realistic reenactment was vital to the case, and he had finally given in and shifted the whole works from the courtroom to the scene of the crime. I said everyone was in the same place, but I wasn't. I sat on Dev Kister's stool over the objection of the D.A. Out on the street, Ted's brother was waiting with Cathy in a car. She was dressed in the halter dress and picture hat I had been smart enough to have her bring East with her, thinking it might be of use to Ted.

Ted had the floor.

"Your Honor, ladies and gentlemen of the jury," he said from the center of the lounge, "we have here the exact situation as we did on the afternoon Mr. Kister died. With one exception. As you can see, Mr. Kelly is sitting in Mr. Kister's seat."

"Your Honor," the D.A. said, "this is all very irregular and now we don't even have an *exact* duplicate."

"I agree," Judge Haworth replied, "but let's see where the defense is going. Go ahead, Mr. Summers, but I caution you that you promised new evidence, and I expect it."

"Thank you, your Honor. At this point, with the Court's permission, I would like to have Mr. Kelly make a statement."

The judge nodded assent. Some intro—no drum roll, no applause. A nod, yet. You're on—curtain going up, Chick!

"Your Honor, I'm sitting on this stool because this entire case rides on perspective. Okay, Cuz, serve the booze."

Cuz brought the glasses, exactly as I had instructed him, and on cue Cathy walks in the same way she did that first time we saw her. Her entrance has the same effect, only this time, not

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only we at the bar are looking at her, so is the jury, the judge, and the D.A. The room goes dead-silent, which I had hoped for, and then I act. The clinking sound in Slim Hager's empty glass turns all heads back to the bar.

Hager looks down at his glass and sees the grape seed sitting in it and then looks up at me. It's the oddest expression I've ever seen. Not surprise, or anger, or fear. I swear it's admiration.

The D.A. is on his feet and across the room looking at Hager's glass. "How did you do that, Kelly? I had my eyes off you only for a split second."

"A split second, Mr. District Attorney. Kids learn to zing seeds and pits through their teeth the same way cowboys learn to expectorate tobacco juice. That was a pretty good angle shot you made, Slim. The drinks were on the bar, the girl enters, and you zing it—what was it? A gelatin droplet filled with poison? Everyone was digging into his pocket for change, including you, but you were also popping peanuts into your mouth. You zinged the poison-filled pellet into the glass and then all you had to do was wait until Dev took a sip of the Manhattan. I had to practise for an hour or so, but I was hitting .500 with the seeds once I got the knack again."

"So what have you proved, Chick?" Slim said, taking the seed out of his glass and rolling it between his forefinger and thumb. "That you can spit seeds with accuracy? Hell, son, that's really reaching."

The judge wanted to know who Cathy was and Ted explained the whole deal about Dev being her father.

"What *did* you see that afternoon, Miss Verne?" the judge asked.

"Nothing! I've told Mr. Summers that and I told Mr. Kelly that." She was talking rapidly and stridently as if she wanted to get out of there just as fast as she had the day her father was murdered. I took her off guard.

"What's the feeder airline between La Paz and Boca de Apiza, Cathy?"

"La Paz?" She gave me a confused look. "What has La Paz got to do with this?"

"Your mother's marriage certificate, honey bear. To get to Boca de Apiza today, you would have to make connections out of La Paz. Yet you told me on the beach that night that you've never been out of the country. How did you get a Xerox copy of this

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certificate? Don't tell me your mother had it, because they didn't have Xerox's back in 1942."

"Why, I sent for it by mail."

"How did you know where to send? Your mother's letter to you doesn't mention the name of the town. Someone had to tell you. Someone who was on that ship making the movie would remember, though. Someone who was interested in Mona Verne, like Slim Hager."

She was starting to tremble. "Chick, I don't understand. I—"

"No, honey bear, *I* understand, and the jury *will* understand. I don't know how you and Slim got together, but you did, and it was bad news for Dev Kister. Maybe it was all your idea. After what Kister did to your mother, I can't buy this great love you had for a long-lost daddy. You're in up to your neck, Cathy, and you're going to take the fall with your accomplice."

"Stop it!" It was Slim Hager. He was gripping the edge of the bar with his hands and his body swayed.

"She had nothing to do with it," Hager went on. "She didn't know I was going to kill him. My God, she could have been my own daughter if Kister hadn't ruined her mother for me." He turned and put his back to the bar and looked at the judge and jury. "I accidentally met Cathy at a shopping center in Hollywood about three months ago. For a moment I thought she was Mona, an ageless Mona. We had lunch and she told me about her mother's death and about the letter.

"All those years of hatred for her mother drained out of me. I flew down to Boca de Apiza because I remembered that was the port where Kister took Mona ashore. There it was, proof that my Mona was a lady and not a tramp."

He turned to me. "Do you know what that can do to you, Chick? It busts you up in little pieces inside, and when you try to put the whole thing together again, it comes out twisted and misshapen. I knew Millington was in trouble with Kister financially." Then, to Jock Millington, "Sorry, Jock, no malice for you intended. You were just one of the players."

The judge cleared his throat. "Mr. Hager, I must remind you that you are making a public statement and that you are still under oath."

"Yes, your Honor, I know, but I can't let Kelly drag Cathy into this. She thought she was just going to shock Kister, leave, and then I was supposed to negotiate a settlement for her."

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I looked over at Cathy. The trembling had stopped, but her skin was pale under the suntan, like diluted chocolate milk. "Cuz, give the lady a brandy," I said. "How about you, Slim?"

"Sure, why not?" He took the snifter and raised the glass to me. "Here's to you, Chick. I don't know how you found her or how you figured out the spitting bit, but you did, so here's to you."

"A couple of old stars gave me the idea. Randy Scott and Pat O'Brien were bombing with precision and I almost choked on a grape seed. Then I thought about cowboys—it's the way a comic's mind works, Slim. You look at the oddball things. But tell me, why have Cathy walk in here at all?"

"Ah, you missed that point? I'm a bit disappointed in you, Chick, since you love movies so much. It's a screenwriter's device. I had to divert everyone's attention, but most of all Dev Kister's. I deliberately mentioned Mona Verne just before Cathy entered—put her image in his mind's eye. Then when what seemed to be a vision of Mona appeared, he had eyes for nothing else. A bit of poetic justice, don't you think?"

Maybe, but the State of New York doesn't see the poetry, only the justice, and Slim got life. Millington, of course, went free. Ted Summers got a nice fee out of handling Cathy's claim against her father's estate. Hell, even Roland Biscaine came up with a nugget because his ladylove, Sally Trent, got a settlement. As I said a while back, I was the only loser.

First, I decided to lose Cathy because I could never be sure that Slim had been telling me the truth that she knew nothing about his plan. Second, I haven't sold a Perfect Manhattan in five months. The only positive offer I've got was in a letter from Dolly Kirkland out on the coast. The lady with the gold lamé pants wrote that the pool was still waiting and that she would pay for the swimming lessons. With my luck, I wouldn't drown. Curtain coming down, folks!

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by
LAWRENCE BLOCK

Maybe there was once something else he wanted to do. Maybe at some stage of his life he had the potential to do other things, to be somebody other than the man he turned into . . . But for thirty years violence and bloodshed had been part of the game . . .

THE DANGEROUS GAME

by LAWRENCE BLOCK

When she heard his car in the driveway she hurried at once to the door and opened it. Her first glimpse of his face told her all she wanted to know. She'd grown used to that expression over the years, the glow of elation underladen with exhaustion, the whole look foreshadowing the depression that would surely settle on him in an hour or a day or a week.

How many times had he come home to her like this? How many times had she rushed to the door to meet him?

And how could he go on doing this, year after year after year?

She could see, as he walked toward her now, just how much this latest piece of work had taken out of him. It had drawn new lines on his face. Yet, when he smiled at her, she could see too the young man she had married so many years ago.

Almost 30 years, and she treasured all those years, every last one of them. But what a price he'd paid for them! Thirty years in a dangerous draining business, 30 years spent in the company of violent men, criminals, killers. Men whose names were familiar to her, men like Johnny Speed and Bart Callan, men he had used (or been used by) on and off throughout his career. And other men he would work with once and never again.

"It's finished," she said.

"All wrapped up." His smile widened. "You can always tell, can't you?"

"Well, after all these years. How did it go?"

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"Not bad. It's gone better, but at least it's finished and I got out of it alive. I'll say this for it, it's thirsty work."

"Martini?"

"What else?"

She made a pitcher of them. They always had one drink apiece before dinner, but on the completion of a job he needed more of a release than came with one martini. They would drain the pitcher, with most of the martinis going to him, and dinner would be light, and before long they would be in bed.

She stirred at the thought. He would want her tonight, he would need her. Their pleasure in each other was as vital as ever after almost 30 years, if less frequently taken, and they both lived for nights like this one.

She handed him his drink, held her own aloft. "Well," she said.

"Here's to crime," he said. Predictably.

She drank without hesitating, but later that evening she said, "You know, I like our toast less and less these days."

"Well, get a new toaster. We can afford it. They have models now that do four slices of bread at a time."

"I mean *Here's to crime.* You knew what I meant."

"Of course I knew what you meant. I don't know that I like it much myself. *Here's to crime.* Force of habit, I guess."

"It takes so much out of you, darling. I wish—"

"What?"

She lowered her eyes. "That you could do something else."

"Might as well wish for wings."

"You're really that completely locked in?"

"Of course I am, baby. Now how many times have we been over this? I've been doing this my whole life. I have contacts, I have a certain reputation, there are some people who are kind enough to think I'm good at what I do—"

"You'd be good at anything you did."

"That's a loyal wife talking."

"It's still true."

He put his hand on hers. "Maybe. Sometimes I like to think so. And other times it seems to me that I was always cut out for this line of work. Crime and violence and sudden death."

"You're such a gentle, gentle man."

"Don't let the word get out, huh? Not that anyone would be likely to believe you."

"Oh, baby—"

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"It's not such a bad life, kid. And I'm too old to change now. Isn't it funny how I get older all the time and you stay the same? It's my bedtime already, an old man like me."

"Some old man. But I guess you're tired."

"I said bedtime. I didn't say anything about being tired."

But in the days that followed she knew just how tired he was, and there was a brooding quality to his exhaustion that frightened her. Often at such times he liked to get away, and they would flee the city and spend a couple of weeks unwinding in unfamiliar terrain. This time, when his depression failed to pass, she suggested that they go away for awhile. But he didn't want to go anywhere. He didn't even want to leave the house, and he passed the daytime hours sitting in front of the television set or turning the pages of books and magazines. Not *watching* the television, not *reading* the books and magazines.

At one point she thought he might want to talk about his work. In their first years together he had been excited about what he did, and at times she had felt herself a participant. But with the passage of time and with his growing discontent about his profession he tended to keep more and more of it to himself. In a sense she was grateful; it alienated her, the corruption and violence, the wanton killing, and it was easier for her to love him if she let herself dissociate the man from his work. And yet she wondered if this didn't make the burden on his shoulders that much heavier for the lack of anyone to share it.

So she made an effort. "You've hardly talked about it," she said one afternoon. "It went well, you said."

"Well enough. Won't make us rich, but it went quite smoothly. Hit a couple of snags along the way but nothing serious."

"Who was in this one? Johnny Speed?"

"No."

"Callan?"

"I don't think I'm going to be able to use Callan any more. No, none of the regulars came into it this time. Let's say I put it together with a cast of unknowns. And there was nobody in it I'd care to work with again." He chuckled mirthlessly. "Hardly anybody got out of it alive, as a matter of fact."

"Then it was very violent."

"You might say that."

"I thought so. I can tell, you know."

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"You've said that before. It's hard to believe, but I guess I believe you."

"If there were just a way to avoid the violence, the awful bloodshed—"

He shook his head. "Part of the game."

"I know, but—"

"Part of the game."

She let it go.

His mood lifted, of course. The depression had been deeper than usual and had lasted longer than usual, but it was not nearly so deep or so enduring as some he—and she—had been forced to live through in the past. Some years previously drinking had become a problem. Alcoholism was virtually an occupational illness in his profession, and of course it made efficient functioning impossible.

He'd gone on the wagon for several years, then found he was able to drink normally again. A single martini before the evening meal, a pitcher of them at the conclusion of a job, an occasional beer with lunch when he was resting up between jobs. But drinking never became a problem again, and she thanked God for that, even as she prayed to God that he could get into a line of work that didn't take so much out of him.

She raised the subject again one evening. He'd begun to talk about going back to work, not right away but before too long, and she wondered how he could face it so soon.

"You don't have to work so much," she said. "The kids are grown and gone. You and I have everything we want and money in the bank. You don't have to drive yourself."

"It's not a matter of driving myself. I can't sit idle too long. It gets to me."

"I know, but—"

"Rather wear out than rust out. Trite but true."

"Couldn't you try something else some of the time? Couldn't you try doing what you really want to do?"

He looked at her for a long moment, then turned his eyes aside and gazed off into space. Or, perhaps, into time.

"I've tried that," he said at length.

"I didn't know that."

"I didn't really want to talk about it. It didn't work out." Now he turned to face her again, and the expression on his face was enough to break hear heart. "Maybe there was once something

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else I wanted to do. Maybe at some stage in my life I had the potential to do other things, to be somebody other than the man I turned into."

But I love the man you turned into, she thought. I love the man you are, the man you've always been.

"I may have the dreams," he said. "But that's all they ever were, baby. Dreams. You know what happens to dreams when you wake up. They go where smoke goes, into the air. Maybe I was born to do what I do. Maybe I just trained myself and wound up painting myself into a corner. But I'm an old man now—"

"You are like hell an old man!"

"—and it's all I know how to do and all I even seem to want to do. I've spent my whole life with crooks and grifters and strong-arm men, and I'll spend the rest of it with the same awful types, and yes, there'll be violence, but I guess I can go on living with that."

He smiled suddenly, and not merely with his mouth. "It's not so bad," he said. "It's depressing when I think of what might have been, but the hell with that, kid. I'm doing what I was cut out for. That's a hard thing to admit to yourself and it hurts, I'll say it hurts, but once you make yourself believe it, then it becomes a liberating thing."

She thought for a moment. "Yes," she said. "Yes, I suppose that's true."

And so she was prepared a week later when he told her he was ready to go back to work. He'd been restless for a day or two, pacing back and forth across the living-room rug, jotting incomprehensible notes on long yellow pads of paper, even mumbling and muttering to himself. Then on Monday morning he looked at her over the brim of his second cup of coffee and told her.

"Well, the signs were there," she said. "You're sure you don't want more time off?"

"Positive."

"And you know what you want to do?"

"Uh huh. I'm going to use Johnny again."

"Johnny Speed. How many times have you used him?"

"I don't know. Too many, I guess. He's got a lot of miles on the clock but I guess he's good for another go-round."

"How long do you think it'll take?"

"Couple of weeks."

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"Be careful."

He looked at her. "Oh, come on," he said. "The violence never touches me, baby. You know that."

"Oh, but it does."

"Come off it."

"It's a dangerous business."

"Dangerous business," he said, tasting the phrase. "I kind of like that."

"Well, it is."

"I like the phrase," he said. "I don't know that it fits my life—"

"I think it does."

"—but it certainly fits the current project. *Dangerous Business. A Dangerous Business.* Which do you prefer?"

"I don't know. *The Dangerous Business?*"

"You know, that's best of all. *The Dangerous Business.* I think I'm going to use it."

"Don't you have to make sure nobody's used it already?"

"Doesn't matter. There's no such thing as copyright on titles. I thought you knew that."

"I must have forgotten."

"*The Dangerous Business.* A Johnny Speed Mystery. Yes, by God, I'm going to use it. It has a nice ring to it and it fits the plot I've got in mind."

"It fits, all right," she said. But he was caught up in the book he'd start that morning and didn't even notice the tone of her voice.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by OTTO PENZLER

GRAND DAME: Apart from occasional stories in EQMM, Christianna Brand, one of the great detective story writers of this century, has not been very prolific in the mystery world in recent years, devoting her time instead to children's books and other matters. But that is changing and we can all be grateful and expectant. Anthony Boucher once wrote of her: "You have to reach for the greatest of the Great Names (Agatha Christie, John Dickson Carr, Ellery Queen) to find Brand's rivals in the subtleties of the trade . . ." Yes, indeed. Two romantic suspense novels by Miss Brand have just been published by Brooke House (9543 Cozycroft Ave., Chatsworth, Calif. 91311)—*Court of Foxes* and *Starrbelow,* each priced at $6.95. Set in Eighteenth Century London, they do not have Inspector Cockrill among the characters, of course, which is their only flaw.

GRAND MASTERS: This is a good time to be a mystery aficionado. New books in the genre are published at a prodigious rate and, equally satisfying, many of the great classics by the masters of mystery are being reprinted. Large series of vintage titles are available from The Arno Press (44), Garland Publishing (50), The Mystery Library (ongoing, with the first two in print), and now, for those of us who love the short story form, the first three volumes of an impressive series: the *Masterpieces of Mystery* library, selected and edited by no less a master than Ellery Queen.

Handsome hardcover volumes, reminiscent of the elaborate Victorian bindings of another age, portraits and biographies of the authors, and introductions (by Queen) enhance this superlative series, which does justice to the true and natural form of detective fiction—the short story. In addition to everything else, the books are a bargain; at $4.95 each, there is no excuse for failing to add them to your shelves. The first three volumes are subtitled *The Supersleuths, The*

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Prizewinners, and *The Grand Masters.* For further information, write 1716 Locust Street, Des Moines, Iowa 50336.

GRAND LARCENY: To readers of EQMM, it is redundant to note that the greatest crook in literature is still alive and active, thanks to the inspired imagination and typewriter of Barry Perowne, Yes, of a certainty, it is A. J. Raffles, the noble thief, whose wondrous exploits have been collected in *Raffles of the Albany* (St. Martin's Press, $8.95). Subtitled "Footprints of a Famous Gentleman Crook in the Times of a Great Detective," it just barely fails to record the appearance of S. Holmes, Esq., though Dr. Watson and Dr. A. Conan Doyle are present, as are Oscar Wilde, John L. Sullivan, Robert Louis Stevenson, and other surprise guests. If these stories are new to you, you are to be envied the joy of your first encounter.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

Games of death—or at least of super crime — are becoming familiar playthings of the toy industry. In 1949 the venerable Parker Brothers adapted the British board game *Cluedo* into an American variation, *Clue,* its setting (the passage-riddled mansion of Mr. Boddy, "victim of foul play"), weapons and suspects reminding one strongly of those classic whodunit novels which habitually mapped out murder rooms. *Clue*—unlike some imitators like *Mr. Ree*—has lasted in unabaited popularity to this day, last year alone selling a million copies. There have been other literary inspirations: *The Sherlock Holmes Game,* in which "agents of the notorious Professor James Moriarty have stolen the crown jewels," pursued by the great detective across colorful London board locations (Cadaco Inc.); *221B Baker Street* lets players tackle several different cases (Gammon). The deductive *Sleuth,* created by ultimate gamesman Sid Sackson, now looks a good deal like a Holmesian figure but started life as an Ellery Queen mystery game—"The Case of the Elusive Assassin" (Avalon Hill).

More modern police play can be had in *The Barney Miller Game,* "with the 12th precinct gang" apprehending pickpockets and shoplifters, and in *Dungeon Dice,* where you plot your own prison tunnel escape (both Parker).

In England, the realistic TV series about the police flying squad, *The Sweeney,* has sparked

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an enormously popular cops-and-robbers game (Omnia). And Walt Disney's *The Rescuers* has as its objective the recovery of a kidnaped girl. In a traditional vein, there have been experiments (Hallmark and others) to construct jigsaw-puzzle solutions to minimysteries.

Espionage has become a lurking boardgame theme. *KGB,* by a Canadian firm, is an elaborate, complex cold-war spy chase, and the English *Sigma File* concerns the recovery of a briefcase; the players can choose to be agents of four different countries. (An American variant is called *CIA.) Petropolis,* in which contestants fight for oil rights and petromillions, and which was fashioned by jetsetting young Baron Arnaud de Rosnay first on a gold-and-ruby board (but now marketed in a populist version by Pressman), deals naturally with intrigue and skullduggery in high places.

But the newest game craze—and the despair of commercial toymen—uses no boards, spinners, dice or any usual game paraphernalia. Most often called "Dungeons and Dragons," it is half epic mystery and fantasy, and inspires almost cultish devotion: in endless games, players fashion both alter-egos and personal underworlds in which to conquer (or become) villains, retrieve (or steal) great treasures . . . a wildly inventive approach that may well point some would-be Raffles or Mr. Ree to a very personal locked-room puzzle game of the future.

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INTERVIEW: HAROLD Q. MASUR

With the appearance of "Framed for Murder" in this issue of EQMM, attorney Scott Jordan has been the hero of more than 60 short stories and a dozen novels. Harold Q. Masur is a former president of the Mystery Writers of America and is presently the legal counsel for that organization.

EQMM: You are an attorney, your series hero, Scott Jordan is also a lawyer, and you write about legal cases. Do you use your experiences as a lawyer, or other true crime cases, as the basis *for your fiction?*

MASUR: Real-life crimes are generally committed by a very shabby, tawdry kind of individual—a member of the underworld, young predators who roam the streets, or, if it is someone from a different background, one who is psychologically unsound —none of whom make interesting subjects for stories. There are writers who can handle these characters but I can't. I prefer the people in my stories to have backgrounds as lawyers, brokers, doctors — people from the

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professional, business, or theatrical world.

EQMM: Apart from the characters, do you use real crimes as the premise for a story?

MASUR: I have used a stray idea now and then, but they come only rarely. To the extent that some incident will capture my imagination in a real crime or courtroom stituation, I'll incorporate it, but that's all.

EQMM: Is Scott Jordan your only series character?

MASUR: No. In the days just before World War II, I wrote for the pulps about a hard-boiled private eye named Sam Quentin, who appeared in my first published detective story, titled "The Post-Mortem of Mortimer Post." I did a great number of stories about Quentin, all of which were pretty much pastiches of Carroll John Daly's Race Williams and Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe.

I must have written about 500 stories for the pulps, sometimes using five or six pseudonyms in a single issue of a magazine such as *Ten Detective Aces, Popular Detective,* and *Dime Detective.* After reading Chandler's *The Big Sleep,* I was so impressed with the quality of the writing, the multi-dimensional characterizations, the atmosphere, that I decided detective fiction was my field.

EQMM: Why did you change from Sam Quentin to Scott Jordan as your hero?

MASUR: I was writing my first book, *Bury Me Deep,* and, frankly, wanted someone with a little more class. I also wanted to use my legal background. While everyone seemed to write about private eyes, I believed that the most successful character in detective fiction was Perry Mason, and I developed Jordan somewhere between Mason and Archie Goodwin—bright, brash, crazy, but brilliant, and a damn good lawyer.

EQMM: Do you see yourself as Jordan in any way?

MASUR: I think he's an idealized version of what I would like to be if I weren't what I am. He's far more resourceful, better-looking, a great guy with the ladies—all the things I'd like to be. He is what I think most fictional characters should be—larger than life.

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

The glories of the Golden Age detective story—and long may they prosper!—live again in James Anderson's *The Affair of the Blood-stained Egg Cosy* (McKay-Washburn, $6.95). The scene is an English country estate (floor plan provided) called Amberley, where the eccentric Earl of Burford plays host to a

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widely assorted house party. Among the elements in the intricate plot are state secrets, a society jewel thief known as the Wraith, a rare gun collection, a secret passage, and a threat of thirteen at dinner, all climaxed by a lengthy gathering-of-the-suspects scene.

The detective is Inspector Wilkins, a self-described "simple country bobby" who makes Lt. Columbo look arrogant. His oft-repeated catch phrase: "I'm not sanguine."

Despite the tongue-in-cheek title, Anderson has not set out to burlesque or parody the classical mystery in *Murder by Death*-style. What he has done is much more difficult: to write a '30's mystery in the style of the time, straight-faced throughout, patiently constructing the kind of plot few writers today would even attempt, rich in misdirection and complication, clues plentiful and audaciously showcased, all loose ends accounted for. It is a beautiful performance.

There are hints that Wilkins may become a series character. Anderson will not have an easy time topping this masterpiece, but I would love to see him try. (*****)

**** Emma Cave: *Little Angie,* Coward, McCann, and Geoghegan, $7.95. Angela Maclintock, recovering from a disastrous marriage to homicidal Richard, is taken under the wing of the patrician Sir Peregrine, the knight of her fairy tale dreams . . .This strange, compelling first novel is a gothic that is not formula-bound. It is full of well-drawn if weird characters and rich in psychological insights.

*** Margaret Scherf: *Don't Wake Me Up While I'm Driving,* Doubleday Crime Club, $5.95. A veteran of the farcical mystery joins the nostalgia craze in this novel of bootlegging and murder in Prohibition-era North Dakota. The jokes and the charming slick-fiction romance of Hal and Rosie count for more than the plot.

*** Arthur Maling: *Schroeder's Game,* Harper and Row, $7.95. Partner Tom Petacque, with a history of mental illness, has vanished, and Brock Potter again must turn detective to save his friend and, ultimately, the brokerage firm of Price, Potter, and Petacque. A good addition to the series of big business detective novels that started with *Ripoff.*

*** Colin Watson: *It Shouldn't Happen to a Dog,* Putnam, $7.95. Murder revisits Flaxborough as an employee of a dog-food business falls to his death from a fairground spaceship. The owner of the firm and his wife do their best to frame each other, but Inspector Purbright clears things up. Watson has done better plots, but the narration is droll as ever.

*** E. X. Ferrars: *Blood Flies Upwards,* Doubleday Crime Club, $5.95. Alison Goodrich takes the job of housekeeper at a remote English country house in the hope of finding out what happened to her sister Sally, who vanished while in the same job.

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The heroine's self-sufficiency and reasoning ability allow this one to be called a detective story rather than a gothic. Strong on plot, characterization, and pure story-telling.

*** John Wainwright: *The Bastard,* St. Martin's Press, $7.95. A Scotland Yard man, a local constable, and a bank robber are snowed in in a deserted Yorkshire farmhouse. The constable's unrelentingly tough narration, full of macho posturing, would be right at home in the pages of *Black Mask.* The prose is laid on so thick you wonder how it works, but somehow it does, and the result is a suspenseful novel with a twist at the end to explain the psychology.

*** Michael Kirk: *Dragonship,* Doubleday Crime Club, $5.95. In his second case, marine claims adjustor Andrew Laird investigates a fire aboard the cargo ship *Velella* (Greek-owned, Panamanian registry, out of Copenhagen). The captain is dead and a passenger missing, and a replica of a Viking ship is among the destroyed cargo. The Kirk pseudonym hides an accomplished pro, Bill Knox, who turns in his usual sound effort.

** Collin Wilcox: *Doctor, Lawyer,* Random House, $6.95. A San Francisco serial killer is bumping off people following the "Doctor, lawyer, merchant, chief . . ." nursery rhyme, and Lt. Frank Hastings thinks the Chief of Police is pencilled in for fourth victim. Promising start, disappointing conclusion. They don't make serial killers like they used to.

** Charles Whited: *The Brandon Affair,* Signet, $1.75. Did Presidential candidate John Leslie Bolt commit a rape murder in Miami twenty years ago? Hard-drinking investigative reporter Steve Comfort wants to find out. Rich in the clichés of today's popular fiction Whited unfortunately doesn't use them very well. It's still fun, though, and surprisingly involving.

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"Q"

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REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

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An isolated mansion in the Virginia horse country is the setting for Elizabeth Peters' latest novel of romantic suspense. Ellie comes to Burton to house-sit for her aunt, but soon finds herself the center of a maelstrom of fear and violence. She had discovered a seemingly innocent volume about the inbred aristocracy of Burton, but there were secrets buried in the old book that the modern inhabitants wanted to keep buried, secrets that their ancestors seemed determined to protect—even if it meant returning from the dead.

"Broad comedy and horror are the ingredients which Peters has stirred into a witch's brew in her new thriller."—*Publishers Weekly*

THE FOURTH STAGE OF GAINSBOROUGH BROWN, by Clarissa Watson. McKay-Washburn, $7.95.

Gainsborough Brown was an arrogant artist: flamboyant, selfish, pompous. After an extravagant gala at the estate of a would-be patron, he was a *dead* artist. Not surprisingly, there were a lot of suspects! Not satisfied with the verdict of "accidental death," socialite Persis Willum, herself a painter, turns sleuth and investigates a disappearing forger, some bizarre sculptures, a sinister millionaire, and several hypocritical mourners.

"A sophisticated mystery."
—Judith Crist

"Fast-moving, with some good 'insider' touches."
—*Publishers Weekly*

** A selection of
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AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	RETAIL PRICE	DISCOUNTED PRICE
Anderson, James	THE AFFAIR OF THE BLOOD-STAINED EGG COSY	McKay-Washburn	$6.95	$5.50
Baird, Thomas	THE WAY TO THE OLD SAILORS HOME	Harper & Row	8.95	6.95
Cave, Emma	LITTLE ANGIE	Coward, McCann & Geoghegan	7.95	6.35
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Peters, Elizabeth	DEVIL-MAY-CARE	Dodd, Mead	7.95	6.35
Ed. by Ellery Queen	CHAMPIONS OF MYSTERY	Dial Press	8.95	6.95
Scherf, Margaret	DON'T WAKE ME UP WHILE I'M DRIVING	Doubleday (Crime Club)	5.95	4.75
Wainwright, John	THE BASTARD	St. Martin's Press	7.95	6.35
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a *NEW* Inspector Maigret story by

GEORGES SIMENON

first publication in the United States

The great Maigret grumbles, growls, grunts his inexorable way through the investigation, questioning, watching slyly, sniffing . . . everything helped Maigret in his work—his knowledge of people, of Paris, of problems—and even his constant pipe-smoking . . .

INSPECTOR MAIGRET SMOKES HIS PIPE

by *GEORGES SIMENON*

(translated by Suzie deSurvilliers and Bolton Mellis)

It was five minutes to noon when the three men met in front of 116 Monmartre Street, near the corner of Jeûneurs Street.

"Shall we go ahead?"

"We'll have a drink and then go ahead."

They had their drink at the bar next door, their coat collars turned up, their hands in their pockets, for it was cold; then they went into the building's courtyard looking for staircase C, finally found it, and walked up two flights. Over each door of this complex old building there was an enameled or copper sign showing a range of tenants from an artificial-flower maker to a cinema company. On the second floor, at the end of a dark hallway, the sign read: *French Commerce*, and Sergeant Lucas, walking ahead, opened the door, and asked, "Is Oscar Laget here?"

In the waiting room a man of about 50 was seated behind a green-covered table, putting stamps on envelopes. He started to

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shake his head, then something in the visitors' bearing must have struck him, for he looked at them more attentively and, appearing to understand, got up.

"He is never at his office in the morning," he explained. "What do you want with him?"

"I have a warrant for his arrest," Sergeant Lucas replied, pointing to a paper that was sticking out of his pocket. "Where can we find him now?"

"I don't know. He might be at the Stock Exchange or in any one of the neighborhood restaurants. He will be here at four."

Lucas exchanged a glance with his companions.

"Let me see his office."

The man led the way docilely, across a narrow corridor, and opened a door to an empty office.

"Okay. We'll be back at four."

If Maigret, this time, was in the affair from the start, he owed it entirely to chance. At three o'clock he was in his office in the Quai des Orfèvres when he learned on the telephone that an Algerian stabbing brawl had just taken place in the neighborhood of the Porte d'Italie. Now the Algerians were Sergeant Lucas' department.

"I can't go there, Chief. I have to be in Monmartre Street at four to make an arrest."

"Whose arrest?"

"Laget. You know—the man at French Commerce. The warrant issued by the Public Prosecutor's financial sector."

"You run over to the Porte d'Italie. I'll go to Monmartre Street."

Maigret worked in his office until ten minutes to four, then jumped in a taxi with the two inspectors, went under the archway into the courtyard, and asked questions mechanically, while noting the maze of dilapidated stairs.

"Is there a second exit?"

"None that I know of."

It would be the humdrum arrest of a dubious petty financier, no more.

"We turn right, Chief, on the second floor."

Just a drudgery. The simple fifty-year-old Ernest Descharneau was still seated at his table, no longer sticking stamps but copying addresses on envelopes. In the waiting room before him were five bored-looking people.

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"Has Oscar Laget arrived?" asked Maigret, without putting away his pipe.

"Not yet. He should be here any minute. Those gentlemen are also waiting for him."

Maigret glanced at the gentlemen in question—creditors, obviously, who had been waiting an hour or two in the hope of extracting some francs from Laget. Maigret had time to refill his pipe, after emptying the dottle in an ashtray.

"There's a draft here," he grumbled, turning up the collar of his overcoat.

Ernest Descharneau leaned to one side, listened intently, and murmured, "I think he's here."

"How? He didn't come through this door."

"He always comes in the back way. I'll tell him you are here."

Then, as he uttered the last word, while getting to his feet, a shot rang out from Laget's office. Descharneau tried to rush in, but Maigret brushed him aside and went in first.

The corridor formed an elbow. At the end an open window—the one that had caused the draft—gave on a small courtyard and Maigret, sensitive to cold, shut the window in passing. To his surprise he found Laget's door unlocked. In the office the fat gray-haired businessman was sitting, slumped, at his desk, with a gaping wound in his right temple; on the carpet, his hand hanging slightly above it, lay a pistol.

"Let nobody in," ordered Maigret, turning around.

At that instant some instinct struck him, though he couldn't pin it down. Sniffing, he looked all about him, his hands in his pockets, his hat tipped slightly back. At last his eyes fell on a pair of woman's shoes visible below the curtain of the window.

"What are you doing there?" he growled.

A woman, still young and wearing a fur coat, came out from her hiding place, looked at the three men in dismay, and stammered, "Who are you and what are you doing here?"

"And you?"

"I am Mrs. Laget."

Then one of the inspectors, who had been bending over the body, straightened up and said quietly, "Dead."

Inspector Janvier had been charged with alerting the District Commissioner, the Public Prosecutor, and the Identity Court; while Maigret, grumbling, was left to investigate.

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"Have you been in this office long?" he asked, with a glance out of the corner of his eye at Mrs. Laget.

"I arrived here at almost the same time you did. When I heard footsteps I hid behind the curtain—"

"Why?"

"I don't know. For one thing, I wanted to know—"

"Know what?"

"What had happened. You are sure he is dead?"

She was not weeping; but she was haggard and Maigret decided not to insist. He moved aside to whisper to the second inspector.

"Stay here and keep an eye on her, and see that she doesn't touch anything."

Then he went to the office where the creditors were still waiting.

"Don't leave, any of you. I may need you."

"Is he dead?" one of them asked.

"Completely. As for you"—he turned to Descharneau—"I would like to speak with you in private."

"We can go into Madame's office. If she is not there."

The office was across from Laget's. To avoid interruption Maigret locked the door, idly tried the handle of the stove, which was not lighted, and motioned the man to a chair.

"Sit down. Your name. Your age. Tell me about yourself."

And he obliged the docile man to sit down while he, after his fashion, remained on his feet, pacing the room.

"My name is Ernest Descharneau. I am fifty-four, a former merchant, a lieutenant in the reserve—"

"And at present an office boy," grunted Maigret.

"Not exactly," corrected Descharneau with a touch of bitterness. "But I admit it looks like that."

Despite his threadbare clothes, he was well-groomed, and there was distinction in his manner, that grayish kind of distinction special to people who have had misfortunes.

"Before the war I had a store on Coucelles Boulevard, and business was not too bad."

"What kind of store?"

"Arms, ammunition, and hunting goods. Later I left for the front as an enlisted man, and in the third year of the war I was a lieutenant of artillery."

Maigret then noticed a thin red bar on the lapel of the man's jacket.

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"It was in Champagne that I came to know Oscar Laget, who was under my orders."

"As an enlisted man?"

"Yes. Later he became a sergeant. On demobilization I found my store closed and my wife ill. I had a small sum of money left but had the bad luck to invest it in a business that collapsed a year later. My wife is dead."

Hearing footsteps, Maigret realized it was the district police, but he did not move. Sitting on a side of the desk, he said, "And then?"

"Laget, at that time, had set up a chemical-products business and I went over to see him. He had his offices on Haussmann Boulevard and I was taken on as a salesman. Since you came to arrest him, you must know all about him."

"Say it, anyway."

One might think, at times, that Maigret wasn't really listening.

"The chemical products lasted three years and I saved some money. Then, one day, Laget walked out on the enterprise and I found myself in the street. From then on there was talk of lawsuits—which didn't prevent Laget, a year later, from embarking on a new venture he called French Commerce."

Descharneau paused, wondering if Maigret were interested at all. They were still hearing footsteps and voices in the other rooms.

"At one time there were about sixty employees and the offices occupied three floors in a modern building on Beaubourg Street. Laget published such trade papers as *The Butcher's Journal, The Real Estate Agents' Bulletin, The Hides and Leather Monitor,* and others."

"You were a part of it?"

"When I came back to see him he took me on, without any special title—I was sort of his right-hand man. Later he named me manager of most of the companies he created—even, sometimes, executive director."

"So that now you too are going to be sued."

"Probably," said Descharneau. "You can't imagine how things were going. Even when we had sixty employees we would have to keep borrowing. Laget owned his car and Mrs. Laget hers. They had a six-hundred-thousand-franc country house built, but the servants stayed for something like three months without pay. We'd pay off one debt with another debt. Laget would disappear

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for two or three days and come back looking feverish, and make me sign papers. 'Quick! This time we're going to be rich.'

"I didn't even know what I was signing. When I would hesitate he would reproach me with ingratitude and remind me that he had, so to speak, taken me out of the gutter.

"He had moments of generosity. If he had money, he wouldn't hesitate to give me ten or twenty thousand francs, for no reason at all, even if it meant his asking for them back the next day.

"It was after some ups and downs that we landed here. Mrs. Laget wanted to manage the business herself and she's been coming to the office every day."

Taking his pipe from his mouth, Maigret suddenly asked a question which, despite its simplicity, startled Descharneau.

"When did you have lunch?"

"When? Today? I didn't go out—I brought some bread and cheese. You'll find crumbs in my wastebasket."

"No one came in?"

"What do you mean? Creditors arrived at two, as usual. Which was why Laget didn't risk coming in any more by way of the main entrance. There is a door on Jeûneurs Street—you make your way through buildings, hallways, take quite a walk between two buildings; but he preferred that."

"What about his wife?"

"She came in the same way—she didn't want to face the creditors either."

"Does she usually arrive at the office at four?"

"No, usually at two. But this is the first Wednesday of the month and she went to the Ministry to get her pension. She is a remarried war widow."

"Do you think she killed her husband?"

"I don't know."

"Do you think Laget committed suicide?"

"I don't know. I've told you all I know. I only wonder what will become of me now."

Maigret went to open the door.

"I'll see you again in a few minutes."

When Maigret entered Laget's office he found a dozen people bustling about and they had turned on the electric lights. The photographer from the Identity Court, who had just finished his work, was putting away his equipment. The Examining Magis-

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trate and a young Deputy Public Prosecutor were conversing in low tones, while Mrs. Laget, her face drawn, remained seated in a corner, as if dazed by all the noise and stir.

"Have you learned anything?" the Commissioner asked.

"Not yet. And you?"

"We've found the shell of the bullet that unquestionably was fired by this pistol. Mrs. Laget recognized the gun as her husband's weapon which has always been kept in the desk drawer."

"Mrs. Laget, would you come with me, please?"

Maigret led her into the office where he had interrogated Descharneau.

"Excuse my troubling you at this time. I have only a few questions to ask you. To begin, what do you think of Descharneau?"

"My husband did everything for him. Took him off the street. Made him his assistant. Why do you ask? Has Descharneau been speaking badly about him? He's capable of it."

"Second question," said Maigret. "When was the last time you came to the office?"

"At two this afternoon, to get my identification papers before presenting myself at the Ministry. Until these last months I did not wish to draw my widow's war pension. But under the circumstances—"

"At what hour did your husband usually arrive in the afternoon?"

"Actually at three, as I will explain. He was obliged, for his business, to have large lunches with his clients, with plenty of wine. And since he couldn't sleep well at night, he had gotten into the habit of dozing for an hour in his office."

"And today?"

"I don't know. At two o'clock Descharneau merely said to me that my husband would be expecting me at four sharp on an important matter."

"And he didn't tell you about the police?"

"No."

"Thank you."

While accompanying her to the door, Maigret was still trying to identify the instinct he had had on first entering Laget's office. There were moments when he believed he was coming close to it, then an instant later the memory again became vague.

He was feeling warm now and, his hat still back on his head and his pipe clenched between his teeth, he returned to the wait-

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ing room like a man who didn't know what to do. The five people who, only a few minutes before, had been ready to demand cash payments from Laget, were still there and Maigret, glancing from one to the other, spotted a large young man with a shabby underfed look.

"How long have you been here?"

"Two hours and ten or fifteen minutes, sir."

Descharneau, who had gone back to his table, was listening.

"Did anyone come since then?"

"These gentlemen only."

And he pointed to his four companions who nodded agreement.

"Did anyone go out? No? Just a minute. Did the office manager remain at his table all the time?"

"All the time." But then the young man seemed to hesitate. "Wait. He did go once to the corridor, because the telephone had rung."

"At what time?"

"I really don't know. Maybe around three forty-five. Yes, it was just before you arrived."

"Tell me, Descharneau. Who was calling?"

"I don't know. It was a wrong number."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes—I was asked—I was asked if it were the dentist's office."

Before uttering these last words he had looked down, with the air of someone seeking an idea, at the envelopes stacked on his table. They were circulars that Laget was sending out to hundreds of people. Instinctively Maigret, like the office manager, read the address on the top envelope: "Mr. Eugène Devries, Surgeon Dentist—"

Maigret suppressed a smile.

"Well?" asked the Commissioner, coming back to the Magistrate and the Deputy Public Prosecutor.

"Suicide," stated the latter. "According to the doctor, the bullet was fired at less than fifteen centimeters from his face. Laget would have surely offered resistance to someone who—"

The two men looked up when Maigret broke in: "Unless he was sleeping."

"So you think it is—?"

And the Magistrate glanced at Mrs. Laget, whose fingerprints they were taking and who was stiffening her dignity.

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"I don't know yet," said Maigret. "If it is a murder, it is a honey. For you'll notice that we were here—it makes one think the murderer deliberately waited for the police to be present."

As the Medical Examiner was going by, Maigret stopped him.

"And you, Doctor, have you noted anything abnormal?"

"Nothing at all. Death was instantaneous."

"And afterwards?"

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing. Laget was even more sensitive to cold than I am. You'll notice that the back of his armchair is right against the radiator."

The Magistrate and the Deputy Public Prosecutor exchanged looks. Maigret struck the bowl of his pipe against his heel and refilled it. Laget's face, in a gesture of respect, had been covered with a towel taken from the washstand. The investigators had finished their work and were waiting for a signal to leave.

"By the way, Commissioner," Maigret suddenly said, "as to those two telephones on the desk. One is connected with the phone-company system and the other is an inside wire, a house phone probably leading to the waiting room. Would you mind going out and ringing me on the house phone?"

The Commissioner went out and they waited, all eyes on Maigret, whose thoughts seemed far away. One minute, two minutes, passed. Then the Commissioner came back, looking astonished.

"You heard nothing? I never stopped ringing."

Maigret turned to the Magistrate. "Would you mind coming with me for a moment, your Honor?" And he led him to the office where he had questioned Descharneau and Mrs. Laget.

Maigret was standing, his back to the fire, in his favorite position and he was speaking in a casual voice, as if to play down his having acted so abruptly.

"It was pure chance that I was here at the right time and observed the office manager."

"Is he the one? But that's impossible!"

"Wait. You did recognize him as one of our postwar failures, didn't you? Morally and physically, they are perhaps our saddest heritage. In any case, the victims are to be pitied. Here's a man who was once Lieutenant Descharneau, who certainly then had high moral values. With the Armistice he finds nothing left of his former life. His business is ruined, his wife fatally ill. And it is

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Laget, whose vulgarity and crookedness seem to work wonders in these troubled times, who gives him shelter."

There was a silence. Maigret filled his fourth pipeful.

"I suppose," he said with a sigh, "I could have said the devil with it—let it go. Laget used Descharneau as only that kind can use an honest man. Time after time the latter's sense of honesty bristled with an urge to revolt, until Descharneau's dominant feeling for the man who posed as his benefactor became hatred. Which only increased when Laget, in his turn, collapsed, and Descharneau realized he had sold his honesty for a dish of lentils."

"I don't see what you are—"

"Driving at? I wouldn't have, either, a short time ago. I saw the two men simply as employer and employee, the former sergeant and the former lieutenant, their roles now reversed. I saw their offices beset by shabby creditors and process servers. Then the evasions, the accommodation bills, the unpaid accounts and worthless checks—all the offensive impact of a business failure."

"Which was the real reason for the arrest warrant."

"Exactly. But give me one more minute."

Maigret opened the door and called Descharneau, who came in looking rather frightened.

"Tell me, Descharneau, how many times had Laget already been sued?"

"I don't know. Maybe five or six times."

"And each time he got out of it, didn't he?"

"Oh, yes. He had powerful friends."

"Thank you. That's all."

When the office manager had left, Maigret turned again to the Magistrate.

"You see? Descharneau, this time, didn't want Laget to get away with it. The manager is not in good health, as you must have noticed. He certainly can't hope, from now on, to make a new life for himself. With Laget's arrest, he would have become a human wreck overnight, and have ended in the poorhouse. And, rightly or wrongly, he blamed Laget for ruining him."

"But how could he physically have committed the murder?"

"I'll give you my theory, which will take us only a few minutes to confirm. Today, at noon, a police sergeant and two inspectors came to arrest Laget, who was out, and Descharneau told them to come back at four.

"Don't forget that for days, months perhaps, our man in the

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waiting room has done nothing but stick stamps and copy addresses and that he has had time to mull over a hundred plans for revenge, each one more elaborate than the others.

"He admitted to me that he had not gone out for lunch today, and I suspect he put in the time on his preparations, the traces of which we shall look for in a moment. For it was a rare and wonderful opportunity. On all other days Mrs. Laget arrived for work at the office at two o'clock. But today, the first Wednesday of the month, she went instead to the Ministry to draw her pension.

"As she stopped by, to pick up her identification papers, Descharneau told her that her husband was expecting her in his office at four sharp, and she had no reason to disbelieve him.

"From then on everything was almost too easy. The waiting room, as usual in the afternoon, was filled with creditors who were going to be able to testify that Descharneau had not left the room.

"*Except* for a few moments. At a quarter to four—note the time—they heard what sounded like the telephone ringing. Descharneau later said it had been a wrong number but, when I pressed him, he showed embarrassment.

"We shall see in a moment if, under the table in the waiting room, there is a switch that can trigger a ring in either the corridor or the employer's office. As to the latter, the office manager had to have some means of warning his employer of visitors who were likely to be troublesome."

"Simple enough to check," said the Magistrate.

"And everything else too. At a quarter to four Descharneau went to his employer's office where, a half hour or so before, he had heard him come in. As a former gunsmith, Descharneau had had no trouble getting a silencer which he now attached to the revolver in the drawer. And, pointblank, while Laget was sleeping, he fired."

"But—"

"Wait. He put back the silencer in his pocket or hid it, went back to the waiting room, waited again, and it was then our turn to arrive.

"He told us that Laget would not be long, and we waited like the others. At four Descharneau, who had been listening carefully, heard Mrs. Laget come in and, while she was still in the hallway, pushed the switch of the house phone.

"You ask me why? Because a report, sounding like a shot, had

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to be heard—to make it appear that Laget had either been murdered or had commited suicide at that very instant. A few minutes ago the Commissioner tried to make this house phone work and couldn't. And I'm certain that the reason he couldn't was that the wire had been used instead to set off some kind of small explosive that had been placed on the corridor window sill—the window which was open when we arrived. So it all happened in our very presence, right under our noses. We rushed in and, without knowing it, frightened Mrs. Laget into hiding behind a curtain."

Maigret smiled.

"I was struck, on entering the office, with something out of the ordinary. I now understand what it was. As an old pipe-smoker, I made a distinction between hot smoke and cold smoke. Now, Laget's office smelled of powder, all right, *but cooled powder*. The Medical Examiner, to whom we'll speak of it again, was misled as to the time of death by the fact that the body was propped against a warm radiator—"

On the window sill they found the remnants of a firecracker and the end of the copper wire linked to the house phone.

"It's not true!" shouted Descharneau at first.

But the next day they found him hanging in his cell by his belt.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 467th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . the story of a man's obsession—and how it frighteningly came true . . .

The author, C. D. Bayzik, is a forty-one-year-old housewife. Although she has lived all her married life in Ontario, Canada, she is a U.S. citizen, having been born and raised in North Carolina. She attended Duke University and was graduated from the University of Chicago, from which her husband also graduated. They have "five children ranging in age from two to sixteen." What uninterrupted leisure Mrs. Bayzik has from her family and housewifely duties she spends "in reading, ice skating, gardening, playing the piano . . . and watching her children grow" . . .

THE GIRL ON THE BICYCLE

by C. D. BAYZIK

Matt's mind raced as his cream-colored car roared down the road. He always drove too fast when he felt restless and he always felt restless now when he drove through these rolling hills and bridges over winding streams. It was the most picturesque part of his sales area with its fields and grassy meadows and woodlands and large parks on the outskirts of each community.

Up until the past summer he had made it a practice to slow down some to enjoy the natural beauty and tranquil atmosphere. Had he not slowed down and stopped that fateful day early last summer, he probably would be spending this bright fall day driving calmly and glancing at deep blue sky instead of staring fixedly ahead at the highway as his foot, heavy on the gas pedal, pushed the car over the road.

Maybe he should ask Lou to transfer him to another area, but he couldn't think of any excuse to support such a request. He got

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along well with all the buyers he dealt with and Lou knew it, and his area was as profitable as any in Lou's territory. Nor did he want to jeopardize his job. He'd been with the company for two and a half years now, the longest he'd ever stuck on one job, not an employment history to be proud of at age 36.

For the first time since the breakup of his marriage he had been able to send a monthly check to Marge for her and their daughter, Gloria, who would be 13 soon. In the photos of Gloria that Marge sent, Matt could see a strong resemblance to her mother—long blonde hair, steady deep blue eyes, and a firm chin line. There's a lot of character in her face, Matt always thought, so much like her mother's. He was thankful for that. He hoped to God that she didn't inherit his restless ways and streak of craziness that had transformed him from a handsome, hopeful husband to a frightened failure, fighting within himself to hold onto his sanity and to some self-respect and feeling of worth.

He was grateful to Marge for not returning the checks. He knew she had had to manage on her own long enough to have become self-supporting and that she must have some bitterness against him. Funny though, he thought, he probably hated himself more than she did, but he knew himself better.

Marge always looked for the good qualities in people. She had been a strong, dependable anchor for the ship of matrimony, but he—fool that he was—kept deserting the ship to frequent bars and pursue brazen beauties. His absences weren't always pleasure trips, however: often he went on drinking binges to dull his worries when he lost a job or when he wasn't selling well. And sometimes he drank to try to drown his strong, re-occurring, seemingly irrational fear that someday he would kill someone.

Where had that fear first originated? Now he would never know. He had thought many times that he should go to a psychiatrist and trace it back and maybe be freed of it; but now it was too late. He didn't dare expose his thoughts and feelings to a psychiatrist. Still it haunted him—that feeling of deep tormenting curiosity about how it would feel to kill someone, and then the accompanying fear that someday he *would* commit murder.

Once, many years ago, he had tried to explain this dread to Marge. It was after he'd been on a drinking spree, so Marge wasn't as sympathetic as she might have been.

"You *should* be afraid of killing someone. You're killing yourself with your drinking, Matt, can't you see that?"

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"I don't mean that, Marge," he had tried to explain. "I mean someone else—probably someone I don't even know."

"That should be easy too, the way you drive when you're drunk or when you're restless."

"Marge, please, listen and try to understand," he had pleaded.

Then Marge had started to cry; the loneliness and worry of the previous weekend had broken down her reserve of strength. "Oh, Matt, I can't understand why you want to kill yourself drinking the way you do! I love you. You have me. We have a healthy lovely little daughter. You have a good mind and a good personality, you could hold down a regular job. Why do you quit jobs and drink and run around and then talk about killing someone? Sometimes I think you must be crazy: or maybe I am for sticking around wanting a life I can probably never have with you. Do I push you? Do I expect too much of you? Is it my fault?" She almost screamed in her bewilderment and frustration.

"No, Marge," Matt had said quietly, "it's not you, it's me. Maybe I am crazy." He had walked out then and spent the rest of the day roaming the streets trying to shake off his depression.

When he returned home that evening, Marge had fixed supper for him and had chatted casually and carefully about household happenings and the trip which her mother was planning. He had never mentioned his dread to her again.

And then a year or so later he had left one day and had never gone back and he knew that she was better off without him. He often felt bad when he thought of her, knowing that he had caused her much trouble and heartache. He hoped that the money he sent would help to make life a little easier for her. It was really all he had to offer.

She wrote to him occasionally to keep him posted on what was happening to relatives and old friends. She usually included a recent picture of Gloria. He had one of her standing beside the driveway in a white T-shirt and red shorts, her long blonde hair caught by the wind. And as he thought of that picture still in his billfold, along with a new one of Gloria on her bicycle, his mind reviewed again, as it had so many times in the past months, that fateful day last summer.

He got up that summer morning feeling rested after a good night's sleep in the air-conditioned motel room. After breakfast he threw his bags in the car trunk and started off for another day of selling. The sun was shining, but the wind was busy blowing

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clouds around the sky, and rain was predicted.

The countryside was green and bursting with growing crops and he drove slower than usual to take in the scenery. At the outskirts of the small town he had just bypassed, he saw a young girl standing beside the road hitchhiking, her long blonde hair blowing around her face and her long, almost skinny, legs hanging out from red shorts. The picture of Gloria flashed into his mind; the girl must be about Gloria's age, not more than 12 or 13. He braked the car and pulled over. She ran and hopped into the car, smiling her thanks.

"Hi, I'm Hedy," she said.

Her eyes were a clear blue and freckles were sprinkled across the bridge of her slightly tilted nose.

Because she reminded him of his daughter, his first remark was rather out of character for him and surprised him, but didn't seem to surprise her at all.

"You shouldn't be hitchhiking," he scolded. "Do your parents know that you thumb rides with strangers?"

"No," she replied, "my Dad would kill me if he ever caught me hitchhiking! But I left my bicycle in the park yesterday and he'd kill me if he knew I left it. It's supposed to rain later today, so I have to get my bike home before then."

"Did you hitchhike yesterday too?"

"Oh, no, I rode my bike to the park in the morning, but some classmates came to the park and I got a ride back with one of their brothers."

"Do you think your bicycle will still be there?"

"Oh—I hope so!"

He could tell that it was the first time it had crossed her mind that it might not be. She *was* like Gloria. Marge had complained in a recent letter that Gloria was going through an absent-minded stage as far as keeping up with her possessions. She had lost a sweater and books and then had her tennis racket stolen. He thought it was interesting how alike kids could be at a certain age.

When they reached the park, he decided to go with her to be sure the bicycle was still there, and if it wasn't he could take her back home. He pulled into the parking lot and they both got out, and he followed at a fast walk as she ran into a clump of bushes at the edge of the stream and then emerged smiling, and wheeling a bicycle.

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"Well, that's a relief," he smiled back. "My faith in human nature is restored."

"Do you have a bicycle?" she inquired.

"No," Matt said with a laugh, "and I haven't ridden one for years either."

"Would you like a ride on mine? It's a super ride if you go up to the top of the little hill there and wind down the path and then over the bridge. Here, I'll show you." And she was off, pedaling up the hill. And then down she came, and Matt shared her exhilaration as he watched the joy in her wild flight.

As she stepped off the bike laughing, she said, "Oh, that gave me an appetite! My Dad says I eat more than six boys. Do you want to share my lunch?"

So they sat on the bridge, their legs dangling over the edge, and ate sandwiches and carrot sticks and cookies.

"Now what will you eat for lunch?" teased Matt. "It's not even nine o'clock yet."

"I know," said Hedy, "I just call it lunch. I'll probably go home for lunch. Usually I have the park all to myself for a while in the mornings, then people start to come in after ten o'clock and sometimes it's fairly crowded by noon, even on weekdays, and then I don't like it as much."

"Are you a loner then?" asked Matt sympathetically.

"Hmm, sorta," said Hedy, "I like to bike ride by myself, and sometimes I just sit and daydream, or sometimes I pretend I'm things—like a trapeze artist on the swings, or a stunt bike driver, or a dancer with the shelter over there my stage," she confided, pointing to the round brick enclosure with the white roof.

"You know you look sort of like my girl," said Matt, pulling out the most recent picture to show her.

"Oh, but she's really pretty," said Hedy in admiration. "But her hair's like mine and she has on a white shirt and red shorts like I do," she said, looking down. "Everyone says that my sister, Carrie, and I look alike too. I guess we do, but we're different in lots of ways. She's just a year and a half younger than I am, but we don't play together much. She likes to always do things with a group of friends, and I like to take off on my own. I'm the wild one, I guess. What's your daughter like?"

"Gloria? I don't really know," said Matt pensively. "I'm never home much to see her."

"Oh, that's too bad," said Hedy. "I think you'd make a super

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Dad—you're easy to talk to and fun to be with. You should try to be home more."

"No, actually I've been a rotten Dad," Matt confessed. "I never really supported my family, I walked out when Gloria was just a little girl, and her mother's had to raise her alone. I drink too much and I drive too fast."

"Oh, that's too bad," said Hedy looking at him curiously. "I had an uncle who drank too much. He got killed in a car crashup—I guess he drove too fast too."

"Was anyone else hurt?"

"Yes, the man in the other car was killed."

They had started walking along the bank and Matt leaned down to pick up a handful of stones as Hedy darted over to the shelter to throw the paper from her lunch into the trash container. Then they took turns trying to skip stones across the stream.

"You know," said Matt, "I often wonder what it would be like to kill someone. Have you ever had that thought?"

"No," said Hedy. "I can't even drive yet."

"I don't mean in a car accident. I mean like to murder someone, to choke them or drown them or something like that."

"No," said Hedy firmly, looking at him seriously. "That's crazy, mister!"

"I know," said Matt, gathering up another handful of stones. He thought, I'll make a wish on each of these and then I'll be on my way. Well, fourteen wishes, how many unfulfilled wishes he had, he thought despondently. The sky was clouding over to match his mood and he shivered when a dark cloud covered the sun. He gazed at the fast-moving knee-deep stream and then he turned to stare at Hedy.

She looked back at him with the innocent composure of a twelve-year-old. Then fear grew in her eyes, mirroring the fear rising in him—the fear triggered by a curiosity he knew he could no longer control. And then his hands were around her throat.

It had been very quick and all he could think after was: well, it's done, it's over now, it's haunted me all my life and now it's over, it's done. He left the body in the stream. It might even look like an accidental drowning, he thought; he hadn't had to use much pressure. As he pulled his car back on the highway it started to rain. The rhythm of the windshield wipers and the steady beat of rain on the roof slowly calmed him.

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He read about it in the papers later. The body hadn't been found until the following day because the rain kept people away from the park and by the time a search was organized that night, it was dark and muddy and still pouring rain. The coroner had timed the death for hours after Matt was clear of the area, because of the contents of that "early lunch" in her stomach. It was assumed she had ridden her bicycle there and then hung around the shelter waiting for the rain to stop. And the rain had washed away any other evidence. So even though they declared it to be murder, he seemed to be in the clear.

At first he had been able to put it out of his thoughts during the day, in spite of having frequent nightmares; but now he often found it popping into his mind during the day. So many things seemed to bring it up—rainy days, girls with long blonde hair, hitchhikers; and then Marge had sent the picture of Gloria on a new bicycle and the full horror of what he had done hit Matt. So now he dreaded the days as much as he did the nights.

So here he was, flying down the road, almost to the spot where he had picked Hedy up, wishing that it all was just a nightmare and that he'd soon wake up.

And then he saw her. Hedy, on her bicycle, riding directly into his path. Her face turned to look at him and became contorted with fear. He screamed and swerved and then metal meshed with wood as a large tree brought the car and his nightmare to a sudden halt. He came to for a while and was aware of sirens and voices and pain, and then his mind floated off again.

And then bright lights were blinding him and he heard someone shouting, "The girl on the bicycle, the girl on the bicycle, I killed her, I murdered her." And then he realized with horror that it was his voice. A lady in white, a nurse, came to his side and patted his hand to calm him.

"It's all right, Mr. Knight, you haven't killed anyone. Everything is all right, don't worry, just try to rest."

And he remembered the nurse coming and patting his hand and saying this before, maybe many times before. What had he been saying? How long had he been here? He remembered coming to for short periods to bright lights and hushed voices and people in white moving around and the smells of a hospital and the groans and cries of other patients.

And then he was being wheeled into a quiet, dimly lit room and lifted onto a soft bed where he fell into a deep sleep. When he

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awoke he knew that he had been in a car accident and that he was now in a private room in a hospital in or near the town where Hedy had lived. And he knew he'd had many nightmares about her and had shouted out things. The nurse had always come to quiet and reassure him, but how much had he said?

Did they suspect? Did they know now? Why was he in a private room? Was there a police guard outside the door of this quiet, comfortable room? A nurse entered and smiled to see him alert.

"Hello, Mr. Knight. I hope you're feeling better now. I've brought you some iced water, but I can get you juice or coffee if you'd like."

"No, that's fine," murmured Matt hoarsely.

"I'm Miss Anderson," the nurse continued as she busied herself raising him to a sitting position and then taking his pulse and temperature. "You had a rough time while in intensive care, but we hope that you will be more comfortable for the remainder of your stay here."

Another nurse popped her head in the door and inquired, "Did Dr. Butler say if Mr. Knight could have visitors yet?"

"Yes, he is allowed visitors for short periods now."

"Good, there is a police officer waiting to ask him some questions." And the head disappeared.

Matt glanced swiftly at Miss Anderson as fear gripped his insides. How could she look at him so serenely when she had gone to the police with the information she had gathered from his unconscious ramblings and ravings.

Well, this is it, he thought. Now everyone will know—Marge, Gloria, his elderly parents. He felt more sorry for them than for himself. He had lived in a nightmare for a long time now, but it was just beginning for them. Or maybe they had written him off so completely that it wouldn't affect them much. He wondered if any of them would come to his trial.

The other nurse entered the room and spoke to Miss Anderson. "The girl's parents are here and want to see Mr. Knight. They won't stay long. Officer Blake said to let them come first and then he will talk with Mr. Knight after."

The girl's parents! Matt felt his head spin. He wished he had the strength to get to the window and jump out, but he didn't even know what floor he was on. Why would they want to see him? He lay back on the half-raised bed, closing his eyes and breathing heavily.

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He heard someone enter the room, but couldn't bring himself to look up. Then he was aware of someone standing beside the bed. He opened his eyes and saw a trim, neatly dressed woman standing at his side. She had dark blue eyes and blonde hair and a slightly tilted nose. She was looking at him with concern, and—was it?—compassion in her eyes.

Matt turned his gaze to the father. He was a large blond man, tall, with broad shoulders and large hands which he moved constantly. Miss Anderson had left the room. Suddenly Hedy's remark, "No, my Dad would kill me if he ever caught me hitchhiking!" hammered in Matt's brain.

The mother lightly touched his hand and smiled at him. "Mr. Knight, we want to thank you for saving our daughter's life. I'm so sorry that you are badly hurt, but we will always be very grateful to you."

The father spoke up then, "She wasn't just being careless when she rode into your path—the bicycle brakes failed. Her friends who saw the accident said she wouldn't have had a chance if you hadn't swerved into the tree to avoid hitting her. I hope if I ever have such a choice that I will react as quickly and nobly as you did. We have been very concerned for you and are glad to know now that you will be all right. We are sorry for all the pain and trauma you have had to go through."

The mother smiled at him again and said, "Our daughter wanted to thank you too, but children aren't supposed to visit this floor. We hope that when you are released from the hospital you will come to have dinner with us and she can thank you then." Tears flooded her eyes as she squeezed his hand and then she quickly left the room.

Matt stared after her in bewilderment, trying to grasp what they were saying. It had been a real girl on the bicycle, not an apparition of Hedy. He had saved a life by trying to escape from that apparition. I'm a hero, thought Matt, and almost laughed aloud in wonder and relief.

But then he thought, more soberly, I have saved a young girl's life. Maybe this can be my redemption. A warm glow grew within him. He managed a smile as the father approached the bed, cleared his throat, and began speaking again, this time with great emotion.

"Mr. Knight, we lost a daughter this summer and it has been very difficult for all of us—she was murdered." His voice broke,

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but he cleared his throat again and continued, "So we are especially grateful that you saved Carrie's life. She's all we have now and our children were always very precious to us. The murder made me pretty bitter, and very suspicious of people—you see, they still haven't found the murderer. But a man like you helps to restore my faith in human nature. Thank you." And then he was gone and Matt was alone.

Miss Anderson entered the room, bringing Matt a cup of coffee, and then left again as a large police officer entered, drawing out a pad and pen.

"Sorry you've had a bad time of it. You are really a hero in our community now though, if that's any consolation. I just need to ask a few—"

Before he could continue, Miss Anderson interrupted from the door. "Excuse me, but we sneaked Carrie up so that she could personally thank Mr. Knight."

And then a girl with long blonde hair and clear blue eyes and a slightly tilted nose stood smiling in the doorway. Matt's eyes dropped to her tanned throat as he felt a scream rising in his own.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 468th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . Who says the grand game of being fair to the reader is no longer being played? . . .

The author, Kenneth Watts, is an English teacher at a private high school in the San Fernando Valley, California. He has just resumed his own education by entering Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena. To find time for the seminary he has arranged to teach part time and to tutor. If he can manage any spare time he plans to continue writing. Good luck!

THE SOUNDS OF SUMMER

by KENNETH WATTS

Harold Spoon loved the sound of crickets in the night. In fact, he loved all the sounds and smells and sights of summer.

He loved the chirping of birds in the quiet morning, the perfumed coolness of the air, the early light that baptizes every leaf and dewdrop with fresh life. He loved the buzz of the single bee, the scorched-grass stillness of the midday heat, the yellow light that baked the walks, the walls, the very earth itself.

But especially he loved the evening—the echo of laughter over close-clipped lawns, the damp smell of fresh-mown grass, the magic slanting light that striped the lawn with lengthening shadows and angled its way between trees and houses to pass through the cellar window and throw a shadow-picture on the wall beside his workbench.

The heat rising from his soldering iron rippled the light on the wall. With a pair of long-nosed pliers he moved a transistor into place and tried to solder it for the ninth time. The light was almost gone, and he was rushed.

He squinted through the rising heat and mumbled.

"Just hold still for one second, and I'll—"

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The faint metallic click of a revolver broke the stillness, and a nervous gravelly whisper echoed in the bare cement room. "Don't turn around, just keep working."

The transistor slipped from the pliers, and tumbled down into the tangled mass of wires and parts to the bottom of the small plastic box. Harold straightened up and gave a sigh. "Now what is the idea of—"

"Shut up, and fix your radio." The whisper was desperate. "And don't turn around! I've got a gun. The cops are after me. Just follow instructions and you'll never see me. Then you won't have anything to tell the cops, and I won't have to kill *you* too. They might see you through that window, so don't do anything funny."

Harold stood with his head bowed for a moment, then with a slight shrug he picked up the box. He gave it a shake and the part rattled around but did not come into sight. He turned it over and tapped it lightly on the palm of his hand. He held it in the light and probed among the wires with a screwdriver.

The room was silent again, except for the anxious breathing of the fugitive and the occasional scraping of the screwdriver on the plastic box. A large fly drifted through the open window. It buzzed an inch from the back of Harold's head. Normally he would have killed it with a single sudden swat. But he made no move toward it, sudden or otherwise.

Finally there came the sound of footsteps on the walk. Two legs appeared in the shadow-picture on the wall, and the doorbell, muffled by distance, rang in the house above. Harold looked up through the window and saw a pair of impatiently shifting feet topped by blue cuffs in front of his door.

The fugitive moved closer behind him. He held the gun within inches of his neck, dropping his whisper almost to silence. "They may see you down here. Answer it—and don't let 'em in."

The wooden stairs creaked under their weight, and the door at the top squealed on its hinges. The fugitive stayed close behind him down two hallways, and, with an awkward bit of maneuvering, positioned himself behind the door without letting Harold see him. He smiled at his own cleverness. Harold had seen nothing, and would never have anything to tell. He had even disguised his whisper.

The man outside held out a badge and smiled. The sun was touching the horizon beyond his shoulder. "Good evening, sir. I'm Officer Barnes. We're chasing a murder suspect in this area, and

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we'd appreciate it if you'd keep your eyes open and"—he chuckled—"your doors locked."

Harold watched the man's face intently as he spoke. "Of course, officer, I'll do whatever you suggest."

"Just stay inside and keep the doors and windows locked. It's not likely that you'll see anything. We'll drop by to let you know when it's over."

"Thank you, I'll do that."

"Good. You haven't seen anything strange yet, have you?"

"No, I've been down in the cellar all day—"

"Down in the cellar? Was the house locked up while you were down there?"

"No, I don't usually keep it—"

"Would you mind if I came in and looked around, just to make sure you're safe?"

Harold hesitated. Over the policeman's shoulder the lower edge of the sun was sinking below the horizon. He looked back at the officer's face, and made up his mind.

"Of course, come in."

He swung the door wide-open, and the edge gave a resounding crack as it hit the gunman's hand. The gun flew down the hallway, skipped along the floor, and slid to a stop against the wall.

For one moment the policeman and the fugitive stood facing each other, like statues, with open mouths. Then the fugitive turned to run.

Ten minutes later, as Officer Barnes led his handcuffed prisoner down the front walk, he stopped and called over his shoulder, "That was a mighty brave thing you did, Mr. Spoon!"

But he wasn't heard.

He was too far off for lip reading, and Harold had already turned his back, anyway. He was hurrying back to his workbench. He had not heard a thing all day, the sun was almost down, and he wanted to have his hearing aid fixed in time for the nightly crickets.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by
JACK RITCHIE

Being one of the judges, especially the senior judge, of the Fifty States Beauty Contest wasn't as easy and pleasant a task as it seemed. In fact, it was downright perilous . . .

Jack Ritchie is one of the most prolific and most admired short-story writers in the mystery field. He has written and published more than 400 short stories, and is going stronger than ever . . .

BEAUTY IS AS BEAUTY DOES

by JACK RITCHIE

When I noticed the lavender envelope protruding from under the door of my suite, I picked it up. Inside I found a single typewritten sheet of paper.

> Dear Mr. Walker: If I am not selected Miss Fifty States in the finals tomorrow, I promise that I will kill you. I mean this quite seriously. My entire life would be ruined and so I might just as well murder you. I think I would even enjoy it.

I showed the note to Stubbins and McGee.

McGee rubbed his jaw. "Now that's peculiar."

I regarded him coldly. "That is clearly the understatement of the year. It is a threat to murder me."

"I mean that the note isn't *signed*. How are you supposed to know which girl to vote for?"

I read the note again. "Hmm. You are quite right, McGee. I didn't notice it at first. Then what the hell is the point of sending me the note in the first place?"

McGee gave it thought. "Possibly she just forgot to sign her name."

McGee, Stubbins, and I are the three judges of the Miss Fifty States Beauty Contest. However, since I am the senior judge and

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McGee and Stubbins were likely to defer to any decision I might make, I was obviously the person to influence if someone wanted to win the contest.

"You *do* want to find out who wrote that note, don't you?" Stubbins asked.

"Of course. But there are *ten* finalists."

Stubbins quickly paged through the files of the contestants, apparently searching for one item in particular. He put three folders aside. "There we are."

I had been looking over his shoulder. "There we are what?"

"You will notice that the note is typed," Stubbins said. "There is not a single typing error and the entire message is nicely centered on the sheet of paper. In other words, the typist is obviously not a novice at the machine." He indicated the folders. "These three girls are the only finalists who can type—Miss Wisconsin, Miss New York, and Miss South Carolina."

I frowned. "I still can't figure out that lack of a signature. Could she actually have forgotten?"

McGee brightened. "Maybe she first wanted to see how you would *react* to a threat, even if it was anonymous. If you are frightened and intimidated, she will press home the advantage and make herself known."

"She will be disappointed," I said. "I am neither frightened nor intimidated."

"Ah, yes," McGee said. "But suppose you *pretend* that you are?"

I saw his point. "Very well, summon the three girls here."

McGee and Stubbins accomplished the errand and brought back the girls and their chaperones. I had the latter remain in an anteroom while we spoke to the girls and showed them the note.

Gretchen—Miss Wisconsin—handed it back to me and smiled sweetly. "Why isn't it signed?"

"I don't know. Perhaps the writer forgot?" I gazed at the three of them and got innocent silence.

Olivia—Miss New York—could smile sweetly too. "Why pick on us three? There are *ten* finalists."

Stubbins beamed his information. "You three are the only ones who can type."

I allowed my hands to tremble slightly as I folded the note and returned it to my pocket. "I don't see why anybody wants to kill me just because of this contest. I have been nice to all of you, haven't I?"

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"Of course, Mr. Walker," Melissa—Miss South Carolina—said. "You've been a dear, sweet, intelligent man."

I nodded. "It's quite a difficult job to judge a beauty contest. All I'm trying to do is be fair." I used my handkerchief to wipe my forehead. "Now I want whoever wrote this note to think it over carefully. You wouldn't *really* want to kill me, now would you?"

Behind them, McGee lifted a book a foot above the table top and raised a questioning eyebrow.

I read his message and nodded almost imperceptibly.

He dropped the book and it made a loud bang.

I leaped wildly. "What was that?"

McGee apologized. "I'm sorry, Mr. Walker. The book just slipped."

I laughed nervously. "That sounded rather like a pistol shot." I wiped my face again. "Now, girls, I just want you to remember that I am your friend. Honestly and truly your friend. I'm here to help you in any way I can. If there is anything troubling you, I would be only too happy—yes, *eager*—to do whatever I can."

It was nearly nine o'clock that evening and I was alone when there came a knock on my door.

I found a huge young man with a look of determination in his eyes. "Are you Mr. Walker? One of the judges of the Miss Fifty States Beauty Contest?"

I nodded cautiously.

"This has got to stop," he announced firmly.

"What has got to stop?"

"I am not going to let you crown Gretchen Miss Fifty States."

"And why not?"

"Because I intend to marry her."

I sighed. "Come in and sit down."

He found a chair. "I just can't have her gawked at."

"She has been gawked at from Sheboygan to Milwaukee."

"I know. But this time it will be on nation-wide television. Can't you just imagine what all those millions of men will be *thinking* when they see her in that skimpy bikini?" He brushed sandy-colored hair from his forehead. "Gretchen and I grew up together. We went to the same grade school, the same high school. We took Biology together."

"You were that close?"

He breathed heavily. "I shouldn't have let it go on and on. First it was the Montmorency Cherry Queen, then the Sebago Potato Princess, and on to the McIntosh Apple Darling. I thought that

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would finally satisfy her, but it all just went to her head."

He seemed quite desperate. "Do you realize what will happen to her if she wins this contest? She'll be famous and meet all kinds of rich men and celebrities and get married a half a dozen times before she's through. And she'll be dieting all the time and that isn't healthy. When she weighed a hundred and forty she was always cheerful and light-hearted. Have you come to a decision yet about who's going to be Miss Fifty States?"

"I am still giving it thought."

He rose and hovered over me. "Mr. Walker, if you pick Gretchen, I swear I'll kill you. I won't have any reason for going on anyway." He paused at the door. "The last time I went trapshooting, I got ninety-nine out of one hundred."

I took optimistic comfort in that he had missed at least one.

When he was gone, I decided I needed a drink. I was making it when there was another knock on the door.

It was Olivia.

I glanced past her. "Where's your chaperone?"

She shrugged. "I got some sleeping pills from the hotel doctor and accidentally spiked her milk." She closed the door behind her and a moment later I was a bit astonished to find that we were sitting side by side on the sofa. Her raven-black hair seemed to exude an aggressive fragrance.

She showed the whitest of teeth. "Mr. Walker, I can see that a man of your educated type likes a woman with brains and a lot of culture. How did you like my painting?"

As her contribution to the talent segment of our contest, Olivia had entered one of her paintings of what was very possibly a bridge in the moonlight entitled *Spanscape.*

She leaned closer. "You've been so nice to all of us, and I, for one, am very appreciative."

I cleared my throat. "Appreciative is an adjective."

Her fingers crawled about the back of my neck. "I could be ever so grateful for any little favor you might do for me tomorrow, Mr. Walker. So very grateful." Her eyes were close. Her lips were close. As a matter of fact, all of her was close.

The memory of my Puritan ancestors pulled me to my feet. "Young woman," I said sternly, "that won't do you a bit of good."

She studied me for a few seconds and then shrugged. "All right, then I'll play it straight. I was the one who wrote you that note and I meant every word of it."

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I moved to the phone. "I am going to call the police."

She smiled. "Go ahead if you want to. But I'll just deny that I said anything at all. It will be your word against mine." She put a gleam into her eyes. "You're as good as dead if I'm not Miss Fifty States by this time tomorrow."

She swept out of the door.

Fifteen minutes later I had finished my drink and was working on the second when I had to answer the door again.

It was Melissa.

She carried what appeared to be a liquor bottle gift-wrapped. "Just a token for all the nice things you've done for little old helpless me. It's really good bourbon."

"Where is your chaperone?" I asked routinely.

"The dear thing's fast asleep. Just drank her milk and conked out." She put the bottle on the table. "We won't drink any of this now. I know the rules and I wouldn't want to be accused of trying to influence you in any way. So we'll just save the bottle for a *private* victory celebration tomorrow in case I somehow *happen* to become Miss Fifty States."

Her green eyes looked into mine. "You know, you look so distinguished and educated and all that you remind me of my Uncle David who writes poetry and has it published in the *Tuskachee Clarion*. Right on the editorial page."

Her fingertips began a Braille exploration of my lapels.

"Young woman," I said stiffly, and perhaps a little tardily, "I will not be swayed by any blandishments, present or promised. My judging integrity remains unshaken."

There were some seconds of silence. Then she smiled coldly. "I didn't think there was any harm in trying sugar first. All right then, buster, have it your way. I'm the one who wrote that note. And killing runs in my family because my great Aunt Phoebe once shot a Yankee captain who had the gall to walk into her drawing room wearing spurs."

She went to the door, turned, and decided to restore some of the warmth to her smile. "Keep the bottle and think it over. We could get to be such *good* friends tomorrow night."

She was gone less than ten minutes when I was called to the door again. Frankly, I expected to find Gretchen, but it was a tall young man with untamed red hair.

"Ha," I said, "I suppose you want to kill me too?"

He blinked. "I wouldn't kill anybody. I'm a pacifist. Except in

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time of war, of course."

"You are refreshing. What can I do for you?"

"If you could get my painting back, I'd be very appreciative."

"What painting are you talking about?"

"*Spanscape*."

"You own the picture?"

"I also painted it. Then I lent it to Olivia, but that was before I knew that it was worth anything."

"Let me get this straight. Olivia did *not* paint the picture?"

"No. I did. And I just got a five hundred dollar offer from somebody who saw it in my studio last week and you simply can't pass up something like that. But Olivia says that she's going to keep it for a year while she's Miss Fifty States and after that she doesn't give a damn who knows or doesn't know that she didn't paint the picture."

"Does she know that you came to me?"

"No. She said she'd kill me if I did, but five hundred bucks is five hundred bucks." He looked a bit worried though. "You don't suppose she actually would kill me?"

"Cross your fingers," I said. "I'll see what can be done."

When he left I locked the door and I had no intention of answering it again that night, even if Gretchen didn't miss her turn.

The next evening at eight, Stubbins, McGee, and I were seated at the judges' table on the stage of the arena as the finals of the Miss Fifty States Beauty Contest began.

As I watched the ten girls, it seemed to me that Gretchen, Olivia, and Melissa were clearly a notch above the seven others. Perhaps that was just coincidence, perhaps it had something to do with learning how to type, or perhaps it was just because I'd seen more of them than I had the other girls.

I sighed. Two of the girls had threatened to kill me, but which one of them was actually responsible for the note?

Olivia?

She had verbally threatened to kill me, but had she written the note too or was she just taking advantage of a trend?

And there was the matter of *Spanscape*. She had not painted the entry herself and that automatically disqualified her from consideration in the contest.

Yes, Olivia was definitely out.

That left Gretchen and Melissa.

Gretchen had not come to visit me last night, but was that be-

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'cause she was not the letter writer, or was it because she could not get her chaperone to drink spiked milk?

And Melissa?

Had her Aunt Phoebe pleaded self-defense and been freed by a sympathetic jury or had she been sent to prison?

It was nearly ten o'clock when Stubbins, McGee, and I went into a huddle to make our decision and found that our choice was unanimous.

I stepped to the microphone and announced to the waiting world that the new Miss Fifty States was none other than Melissa—Miss South Carolina.

The usual pandemonium, of course, ensued.

Melissa broke into tears of joy. Gretchen and Olivia instantly followed suit. Gretchen hugged Melissa and *sincerely* congratulated her. Olivia hugged Melissa and said that she knew all along that Melissa really *deserved* to win the contest. And finally Olivia and Gretchen hugged each other and wept over their sheer happiness at Melissa's good fortune.

It was past eleven before I managed to get back to my suite.

There was a knock on my door.

Damn, I said, but I opened it.

Melissa stood in the doorway and she appeared to be somewhat breathless.

I blinked. Had she really meant it last night when she said that we would have a cozy little celebration?

My eyes went to the gift-wrapped bottle still on the table. I felt a bit warm. Melissa's offer hadn't influenced my decision in the slightest, but now that the contest was over—

I smiled.

"You've been *so* considerate," she said. "But I'm afraid that I really won't have time for our little old victory celebration tonight. A Miss Fifty States is *so* busy, you know. You *do* understand, don't you?"

I sighed at the vanish of a dream. "Never mind. I'll drink the whole bottle myself."

Her lashes fluttered over innocent blue eyes. "That's just it and I'm *so* glad I got here in time. If I were you I wouldn't touch one teensy-weensy drop of that bourbon. Because if you do, you'll get an awful, awful tummy ache. If you know what I mean?"

When she was gone, I emptied the bourbon bottle down the drain and poured myself a full tumbler of my own safe brandy.

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a *NEW* baseball detective story by

GERALD TOMLINSON

Larry Carver was the manager of a Class A baseball team (Elm City, Allegheny League) and he had a genius of a pitcher on his roster—young Lew Knebel, dubbed "The Canarsie Cannonball," 17-2 wins and losses, with a 1.92 earned run average. Young Lew was headed for the majors and a sensational career that eventually would land him in baseball's Hall of Fame in Cooperstown. But then something went wrong. . .

THE CANARSIE CANNONBALL

by GERALD TOMLINSON

His poise on the mound was steady and unshakable. From an exuberant young righthander at Canarsie High School, Brooklyn, in the spring of 1951, he had become by late summer of 1952 a canny and consistent Class A starting pitcher, Elm City, Allegheny League, with 17 wins, 2 losses, and an earned run average of 1.92.

"Hey, Lew," I said to him that night—the night he went after win number 18—"keep it fast and low to Tillray. The guy's no Musial, but he won himself some of Fred's threads a week ago on a pretty fair change-up you gave him."

Lew Knebel grinned. "No mackerels tonight, Skipper. Zoom, zoom, zoom. Tillray can't hit the drop."

I drew a pattern in baseline dust with the spikes of my right foot. Looking past Lew's square shoulders out toward the "Hit this sign on the fly and win a suit from Fred's" billboard in centerfield, I said, "Just one of your zooms now and then, Lew. Don't use the drop any more than you have to."

His so-called drop wasn't the old-fashioned kind. It wasn't just a garden-variety curve that fell off the table. It was a spitball, and

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a beauty. It came in fast without a spin, then dived like a kamikaze. Nobody but a golfer with a canoe paddle could hit it. The trouble was, tonight's plate umpire, Babe Francesco, was on to the pitch, and I didn't want any spitball fuss this late in the season.

I was in my second year as Elm City's manager. A one-time utility infielder with the Dodgers, brought up after a couple of so-so seasons with Ft. Worth in the Texas League, I'd gone into managing rather than going down to the minors as a player or back to the Ford assembly line as a riveter.

My first year as a manager had been less than brilliant. I'd led a pretty fair Elm City team to a next-to-last-place finish, a finish that didn't impress the Dodger front office. Important heads wagged.

They weren't wagging any more. This year I had a pitching sensation in Lew Knebel, in a pair of Brooklyn-bound returnees, in a young team fired with enthusiasm, with a good shot at the Allegheny League pennant.

Knebel brought major-league class to minor-league Elm City. He was a tall skinny kid whose father, a tailor, had wanted Lew to follow in his footsteps. But when the boy ambled out to the mound and struck out all but four of the opposing hitters in his debut at Canarsie High (losing the game 2-1 on a three-base error) his father began to reconsider. Two years later Lew got a $4,000 bonus offer, the highest allowed at the time, and that settled the issue.

His father was now his second-staunchest fan. I was Number One. I could already see myself as an old hot-stover saying, "That's right, son. I managed Lew Knebel in his one and only year of minor-league ball. The first day I saw him pitch at Vero Beach, I figured, 'Now there's a kid heading for the big time. A long career with the Dodgers. A great career. Then after fifteen seasons, twenty if he's lucky, he'll join the Cooperstown immortals.' "

And the spitter was a part of that glittering promise. A big part. Not that we talked much about it, since the spitter was, and is, an illegal pitch.

Of course a pitcher can't survive on just one pitch, no matter how good it is. Lew Knebel, a virtuoso from sandlot days, had four pitches: the spitter, a slider, a change-up, and a fast ball. His fast ball was Powder River, the best in the league. It inspired an Elm

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City sportswriter to christen him "The Canarsie Cannonball."

We drew a good crowd that night. Gardner Municipal Stadium, built ten years before, was a decent ballpark for a small city. It had better-than-average lighting, a conscientious groundskeeper, a friendly concessionaire, and a seating capacity of 6,200. Tonight it was about two-thirds filled. Lew Knebel on the mound must have brought in an extra 1000 or 1500 people this late in the season, even with the new and hard-to-resist lure of television. After all, they'd probably be seeing Lew Knebel himself on TV next year, right along with Sid Caesar.

My Elm City team, the Hawks, stood second in the league, a few percentage points from the top.

The weather was stifling, the way Lew liked it. He'd pitched his two best games, both of them one-hitters, in this kind of muggy heat. Warming up, he looked unbeatable.

I watched my ballplayers closely. Studied them. That's what the Dodgers paid me to do. To look; to recognize the potential stars and develop them; to diagnose players' weaknesses and, if possible, correct them. If I won my Class A pennant, fine. If not, it didn't matter a lot to the front office. My main job was to identify and nurture the major leaguers on my roster. If my has-been's, like Arnie Hunter in the bullpen, or my never-to-be's, like Doc Bettinger at third base, happened to approve of my managing, fine. If not—well, they were nice guys, they'd never scare Leo Durocher.

There we were, 1952, the year Eisenhower won the Presidency. A good year. I was trying hard to instruct and encourage my young players, especially Lew Knebel and Sandy Estes. I intended to succeed as a manager, and I intended to start succeeding this year. Even though I wasn't a pitching coach, I thought I'd handled Lew pretty well. Of course that 17-2 record of his and the great ERA had more to do with the boy's talent and instincts than with my advice. He knew that, I knew that. He was what the poets call a natural.

So was Sandy Estes at shortstop, but with a difference. I'd managed Sandy in Elm City in '51, and he'd fielded like a seven-gloved octopus, equal to the best in the business. But he'd hit a puny .170. Only my toe-to-toe pleading with Fresco Thompson, the Dodger V.P., in spring training had ticketed him for Elm City in '52 instead of down to Class C, Greenwood.

Score one for Larry Carver—that's me—because in '52 Sandy

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Estes hit everything but the jackpot at Monte Carlo. He raised his batting average more than a hundred and fifty points, to .328. He was voted the league's all-star shortstop, fielding even better than the year before. Estes would go to Triple-A next spring—Pee Wee Reese's job being unavailable at the moment. I liked Sandy, and took some of the credit for his improvement.

That's how it was in the minors in those days, back when we had a long alphabet of leagues below the majors. Most teams, at least the ones Class B or better, had a couple of future major leaguers like Lew Knebel or Sandy Estes. They also had a whole rafter of turkeys like Doc Bettinger, my third baseman.

A strange guy, Bettinger. Sandy Estes called him "The Loser," and that's what he was, but I never really knew why. He could have been a pretty good third baseman. He had the quick moves, he could usually hit the curve, and he was our smartest man on the bases, though not our fastest. A college student in the off-season, as well as a part-time researcher at Doyle-Kindon Labs in New Jersey, he'd been working toward a degree in pharmacy at N.Y.U. That's how he got the nickname "Doc." It was just as well he had a drugstore in his future, I figured, because at age 27, hitting .233 in Class A, he wasn't about to replace Billy Cox in the Dodger starting lineup.

Erratic. That's the word I'd use, and did use, to describe Doc Bettinger. He'd dive like the ghost of Pie Traynor to stop a sure ground single on one play. Then he'd misjudge an easy pop fly on the next. He'd time a sharp curve perfectly on one pitch, swinging after the break, and line a base hit to right field. The next time up he'd take a third called strike on a fast ball that bisected the plate. In nine years of pro ball he'd never been higher than Class A, and he never would be.

He was erratic in other ways too. Bettinger wasn't exactly superstitious. You wouldn't expect a graduate student in pharmacy to buy a whole lot of baseball superstition—the ballplayers' usual rites, ritual, and rigamarole—and he didn't. But superstitious or not, he was forever changing his equipment or his playing habits—changing his bat, changing his glove, changing his stance, changing his grip, changing his moves. Nothing worked for him, not even my repeated advice to stop it, to settle down.

Tonight, after the ball had been whipped around the infield, Bettinger had started something new. Carefully and for no reason I could see, he began to deliver the ball in person to Lew Knebel.

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Instead of tossing it twenty or thirty feet to the pitcher the way he'd done for the past 110 games, he trotted over to the mound, carrying the horsehide like a sacred offering, said a few words to Knebel, and plopped the ball into Lew's glove.

Maybe he thought the personal touch would help. That's about the only thing I could figure, but it didn't jibe with Bettinger's personality. Say-hey he wasn't. Besides, any concern he had, if he had any, seemed pretty unnecessary—Lew Knebel was mowing down the Hartsfield Chiefs inning after inning. When the top of the third ended, Knebel had five strikeouts, including Tillray on a drop, and our Hawk outfielders hadn't had to worry about making a putout. Lew and the infield had done it all. We were leading 2-0.

But something was wrong.

When Lew Knebel trotted back to the dugout after the top of the third, he looked a little confused, a little hesitant. His movements were jerky, and he acted as if he wondered whether he was welcome on his own bench. He sat down and hunched his shoulders. This wasn't the tough, aggressive Lew Knebel I'd come to know and respect.

I got up and walked over to him. "Anything the matter, kid?"

He shook his head and shivered. He tugged at the peak of his cap. "Damn lights," he muttered without looking up. "Damn lights."

"The floodlights?"

"Yeah. Haven't you—noticed?"

"Noticed what?"

He gave a long drawn-out whistle. Then he giggled. That wasn't like him either. And it didn't go with his glum expression.

"Are the lights bothering you, Lew? What's up?"

He waved a hand across his face, like a man brushing away cobwebs. His voice sounded far away. "Don't worry, Skipper. I'll be—okay."

I had to leave it at that, because just as he finished saying "okay," 4000 fans rose from their seats at Gardner Stadium, voices also rising, heads swiveling. I looked toward the field in time to see an arcing Sandy Estes drive rattle off the wall in deep left-center, dotting the "i" on the Pepsi-Cola sign. The left fielder and the center fielder played it like bushers, and by the time C. J. Kenny, the Chiefs' rookie in center, got his hands on the ball, Sandy was streaking toward third base.

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Arnie Hunter, coaching at third tonight, gauged the situation right, saw the opportunity, took the odds-on gamble, and began waving his left arm like a windmill in a hurricane. Sandy never broke stride. He rounded third at full throttle, leaning into the night air, and raced toward home. The Chiefs' shortstop, a freckled stringbean, pirouetted and fired the ball to home plate.

It was a good throw, a little off to the left. A major-league catcher would have made the tag. But Sandy Estes was sliding this year as if he'd been reading an inspirational biography of Ty Cobb. He nicked home plate with a dazzling hook slide, and Babe Francesco's arms leveled straight out above the August dust, palms down. Safe. An inside-the-park home run.

We led 3-0.

Sandy came charging toward the bench, gleeful. "How about that, Doc?" he shouted. "How about that?"

Jumping into the dugout, he made a place for himself between Bettinger and me. "That'll cost you twenty-five iron men, Doc."

I tapped Sandy on the shoulder. When he glanced toward me, I stared at him, hard. "I don't want to know about any twenty-five-dollar bet, Sandy. I don't want to hear about it. Understand? Neither do the folks up there in the box seats. Keep it to yourself."

Actually, I'd already heard about it. I knew too much about it. So did everybody else on the team. You can't travel by bus from city to city, state to state, staying overnight for three or four days each at seven different downtown hotels, and not get to know your teammates about as well as you know your own family.

Doc Bettinger, our third baseman and pharmacist, was also a gambler. A losing gambler. I think he was what they call a compulsive gambler. He'd bet on anything the mind could dream up, especially if you'd let him set the odds. And four times out of five he'd lose.

I could imagine what must have been the story on the Sandy Estes home run. Doc speaking: "Five'll get you twenty-five you don't hit another inside-the-park homer this year, Sandy."

A pretty safe bet, as Doc's bets went. It was now the third week of August. Sandy Estes had belted six inside-the-park home runs this season, an Allegheny League record. He'd hit three of those homers at the Chiefs' Wennick Stadium in Hartsfield, where you needed a telescope to see the centerfield fence; it was 510 feet to the wall in dead center, the same as at the Polo Grounds.

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The way Bettinger must have figured it, with only a dozen games left, Estes' chances of earning those twenty-five bucks were pretty slim. Sandy needed Class D outfielding on a long triple in a big ballpark. He got it.

Gambling. It was a part of all our lives. It was too much a part of Bettinger's.

Poker games took up a lot of Doc's leisure time. On weekday nights after the game Doc's hotel room, which he shared with Arnie Hunter, turned into a smoke-filled card parlor, with beer, potato chips, Slim Jims, and half a dozen seven-card-stud regulars, including Lew Knebel and Sandy Estes. I knew about the games, but I hadn't taken any action to stop them. I knew that Fresco Thompson didn't like gambling, but I don't think many of his minor-league managers outlawed it. I didn't. Better the pasteboards, I figured, than too many real live girls.

Of course there were those, too, and I'd conducted a few mad-scramble bed checks in May and June. I'd walked in on Knebel with Miss Elm City of 1951, a black-eyed blonde, a photographers' model. Twice I'd caught Bettinger with the ticket manager's wife, a restless redhead whose shapely shadow briefly clouded Doc's image as a loser. But mostly we had a sedate team—at least, that's what I told the front office.

The scoreboard clock—"It's Flaherty's for Fine Watches"—read 8:55.

Lew Knebel tripped and stumbled as he left the dugout for the top of the fourth inning. Stumbled and almost fell. What the hell did that mean? Lew Knebel tripping? Stumbling?

"Hey, Lew," I called after him, suddenly concerned, but Knebel didn't look back. He ambled toward the mound, head down, a skinny kid pounding the pocket of his glove as if the future of Western civilization depended on his super-drop.

I motioned toward Arnie Hunter, and the old reliefer came over and sat down. "What do you think's the matter with Lew?"

Arnie Hunter, a balding moon-faced man with a growing paunch, had thrown a two-hit shutout at the Chicago Cubs many years ago, fanning Big Bill Nicholson three times. He never bragged about it. But he'd never do anything like it again. At 34 his arm was gone, and he was lucky to last a couple or three innings against a run-of-the-mill Class A lineup. This would be his last year as a player. He knew it, and he felt pretty bad about it. He wanted to manage, but I doubted he'd make it. Too easygoing.

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Arnie picked his teeth with the edge of a matchbook cover. "Dunno, Larry," he said at last.

"Thanks, Arnie," I said solemnly. "I knew you'd have the answer."

He spat on the concrete floor of the dugout. "Yeah, Larry."

The top of the fourth inning, Gardner Stadium, Elm City, August 22, 1952: a night that isn't likely to be forgotten by any of the 4,108 fans who had pushed their way through the turnstiles. I know I won't forget it.

After getting an 0 and 2 count on C. J. Kenny, the leadoff hitter, Lew Knebel turned wild. Wild as dandelions.

First he bounced a spitball off the plate for ball one. That pitch by itself wasn't too surprising. Any low-flying spitter is apt to crash in the dirt.

Lew examined the new ball for a long time. Then, as if to make up for his bouncing drop, he wound up very deliberately and threw a high change-up. I mean high. It cleared the batter's head by at least five feet and carried all the way to the screen. The fans let out a worried groan.

2 and 2.

Del Rhodes caught for us that year. He was an Allegheny all-star like Estes, one of those slow-talking Southerners, a boy from Milledgeville, Georgia, whose manner alone could calm an earthquake. He called time, trudged out to the mound, handed Knebel the ball, said a few words to him, and glanced toward the dugout. He motioned Bettinger over from third and stood talking for a while with the two of them. He jogged back toward home plate when Babe Francesco, halfway to the mound, began lobbing threats at him.

Knebel's next pitch, a fast ball, was probably the wildest pitch ever thrown in Gardner Stadium. It took off at right angles to the plate, Lew having stumbled off the rubber as he threw it. A bullet to the grandstand. It hit John R. Flaherty, an Elm City jeweler, on the left shoulder with a loud crack, breaking his collarbone.

Flaherty, a tiny pink-faced man with a hearing aid, was sitting with his two teenaged sons in Box 5-C, directly behind the visiting team's dugout. Jolted by the pitch, he half rose from his seat, howled something I think was an obscenity, and sat down again. Despite his outcry, he looked more surprised than hurt.

No one retrieved the ball. The stands were strangely quiet, as if the fans couldn't believe what had happened.

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Half a dozen Hawks, led by me, sprinted toward the mound. The Chiefs' manager, Ed Jenkins, a grinning gorilla on most occasions, came out of his dugout at a lope, with no grin. Three umpires also converged on the derailed Canarsie Cannonball.

The object of all this attention peered uncertainly in the direction of Box 5-C. He didn't move an inch from where his follow-through had left him. By the time I got to the mound, he'd given up watching the grandstand. Instead he was studying the webbing of his glove with the intensity of a Medieval scholar at work on an illuminated manuscript. He stood there, head down, mute, as our small but excited crowd milled around him, buzzing like so many defective floodlights.

"Hey, Lew," I said, and the buzzing stopped. I had the opening, but I didn't know what to do with it. All I said was, "What's the matter?"

Something was decidedly the matter. Knebel, sweating, stared fixedly at his glove. "Don't you—hear—the lights?" He said it softly, dragging out the question a good ten seconds.

There was absolute silence even in the stands, except for the slight rustling as a pair of ushers escorted John R. Flaherty toward an exit. The old man, dazed and dough-faced, was supported by a son on either side.

"What do you mean?" Sandy Estes asked before I could find my tongue.

A long pause. "Purple," Knebel said, his gray eyes dreamy. "Fantastic—it's—music."

"Talk sense," I snapped. "What the hell's going on?" I started to lay a hand on his shoulder.

He screamed—a shrill drawn-out scream that echoed through the stadium, rebounded off the Allegheny hills, and chilled the night air. The crowd gasped.

"What's the matter, Lew?"

"Don't touch me!"

"Aw, c'mon, Lew." It was Arnie Hunter, trying to console the youngster who'd become his protégé. He said, "Everybody gets wild now and then. Even Spahn."

"Stay away from me!"

"C'mon, kid. Take it easy. Here's a little Slippery Elm for your nerves. It'll make you feel better." He tried to feed Knebel a Thayers Slippery Elm tablet, the spitballers' constant companion. I couldn't believe it. Slippery Elm, with three umpires looking on.

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Poor Arnie Hunter, a spitballer himself, must have been more upset than he looked.

I will say this for Babe Francesco and the other two umps: they were charitable. They cleared their throats in unison and focused their attention on a scuffle in the bleachers.

"Leave me alone!" Knebel shouted. "Get away from me!" He waved his arms awkwardly.

"Why, Lew?"

"Why? Why?" It ended in a sob.

I looked toward Doc Bettinger, who looked fascinated.

"Better take him out," Doc said. "He hasn't got the good stuff tonight. Who's warming up?"

I turned to Hunter. "Warm up."

Arnie left for the bullpen.

I turned to Babe Francesco, the plate umpire, who seemed almost as bewildered as John R. Flaherty. "Get a doctor," I said.

"A doctor?"

"A doctor."

"What the hell do you think he wants?" Bettinger muttered. "A compass?"

I said to Del Rhodes, "Go get Sergeant Schrag from the stands. He'll be somewhere back of third base unless he went over to check the Flaherty box."

"He's a cop?"

"That's right, Del. I think Lew's got himself a dose of something. Maybe peyote."

"Peyote?"

"Yeah. God knows where he could've got it. Maybe Mexico. You ever been to Mexico? Ever tried peyote?"

Rhodes shook his head. He'd been from Milledgeville to Elm City, and that was about it.

"I have," Sandy Estes said. "I tried it one summer, three or four years ago, when I was playing semipro in Alpine, Texas. But I don't think this is peyote. It all happened too fast. Something like peyote maybe. Or maybe Lew's just flipped."

"Lew wouldn't just flip," I said, watching the tall talented pitcher who'd been hearing purple and who, for no apparent reason, had wheeled and fired a 90-mph fast ball at Elm City's leading credit jeweler.

At that point Lew Knebel flipped.

He swayed off the mound, banging into the first-base umpire as

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if he didn't see him, then ricocheted off Ed Jenkins, the Chiefs' skipper, who grunted, "Whoa, there," but didn't try to rein him in.

Lew kept right on going, past first base, through a door in the low green wall behind it, and up the cinder path between the grandstand and the bleachers. He dissolved in the gloom.

Knebel wasn't going very fast or very straight, but it took me almost a minute to recover my senses. Finally I said, "Sandy, you'd better go after him."

Without a word Sandy Estes raced toward the cinder path. Paul Gosling, our big first baseman, followed him, showing more speed than he had since spring training. Paul, a Triple-A veteran down from St. Paul, told me later he figured Sandy might be overmatched by the six-foot-three Canarsie Cannonball.

A few of the fans were starting to stomp. They'd come to watch Lew Knebel and a ball game, and they weren't seeing either one. Too bad for them. I wasn't about to bring in Arnie Hunter, no wins and five losses, and two banjo-hitting bushers from the bench. Not yet.

I'd seen peyote work. I myself had once heard a symphony orchestra play a version of the rainbow down in Nuevo Laredo. I'd seen the twisted stick figures of my friends and teammates. But Sandy might be right. This drug, whatever it was, seemed a lot quicker and meaner than peyote. But it was a drug all the same. And illegal. I knew that much.

I turned to Bettinger. "You want to tell me about it, Doc?"

Bettinger scowled, his black eyebrows almost meeting above a broad sunburnt nose. "Tell you about it?" He feigned innocence. "Me?"

"Yeah, Doc. You. You're the druggist here. What's Lew high on?"

Bettinger shrugged. "Some hallucinogen maybe. Could be mescaline. Could be psilocybin. I wouldn't know. It's out of my line."

"I think it is in your line, Doc. You owe Knebel quite a bit of gambling money, I hear. Six, seven hundred dollars. That's the scuttlebutt. Is it true?"

He shrugged again.

"Doc," I said, "you can start answering my questions or you can start packing for Ponca City. Understand?"

Bettinger rearranged the dirt on the mound with his toe. He looked as if he'd like to take a swing at me. But all he said was, "Yeah, Skip. I understand. I owed Lew a little poker money. It's no secret."

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"Seven hundred?"

"Eight fifty."

"You had a bet on tonight's game? Double or nothing—something like that? I'm guessing. Was there a bundle riding on tonight's game?"

Bettinger fiddled nervously with his glove. Sunburn and all, he looked a little pale. "I won't answer that, Skip."

"You just did. Tell me about the peyote. Was it your insurance against Lew winning his eighteenth?"

Defiantly: "Look, I don't know peyote from peanut butter. I'm not an Aztec medicine man. I'm a pharmacist."

At this moment Sergeant Schrag of the Elm City Police Department elbowed his way into the group. A burly man with a neck like a pro tackle, he wore a plaid sports jacket with wide lapels, Fred's threads from the forties, under which there were a couple of unnatural bulges. I knew Schrag to speak to, mainly because our wives were friends.

"What's the matter with Knebel?" Schrag asked. "Hooch?"

I said, "I think you've got a drug case on your hands, Sergeant. You might call it a practical joke. A joke that's also a crime. I'd like you to take a look at our third baseman." I pointed. "Barry Bettinger. I think he's carrying dope."

"You want me to search him?"

"That's right."

"You'll take the responsibility?"

"He's my boy, Sergeant."

Schrag, a dull man with a keen sense of duty, nodded and said to Bettinger, "Okay, kid, if you got the stuff on you, let's have it. No need for a lot of noise. Otherwise we'll go back and take a look in the showers."

I had a sudden thought. "Try his right back pocket."

Bettinger didn't swear very often, but he swore now. He hurled his glove to the ground and stamped around like Leo Durocher in a rage. "Thanks a lot, Skip. Thanks for everything." He plunged his hand into his right back pocket and pulled out a small white cube that looked like sugar.

Schrag blinked. "Say, that's pretty good, Carver. How'd you figure it out?"

"I'm paid to watch my ballplayers," I said. "I watch 'em. Like Hawks."

Schrag didn't smile. Neither did I.

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I asked Babe Francesco for a new ball. He gave it to me, and I rubbed Bettinger's white cube back and forth on the horsehide, making sure it crossed the stitches. I'd seen Doc go to his back pocket a few times that night and then rub up the baseball.

I handed the rubbed ball to Bettinger—handed it to him, just the way he'd handed it to Lew Knebel.

"Show us Lew's best pitch," I said.

"The fast ball?" Bettinger was still trying to act innocent, but he was no better at acting than he was at filling inside straights.

"The drop. Knebel's drop."

"Hey, wait a minute, Skip. If you're talking about an illegal pitch, forget it. Arnie Hunter may throw the spitter, I don't know if he does or not, but Lew's on the up-and-up. Lew wouldn't throw it."

"Pretend he would."

Bettinger aimed a stream of tobacco juice at my feet. "Go to hell." He thrust the ball back at me, dropping it in my right hand. He rubbed his fingers briskly on his shirt to get rid of the powder. "You're the genius, Skip, why don't you show us?"

"And hear purple sing? Or watch Babe Francesco turn into a pretzel?"

But I did show them. I slowly touched two fingers of my left hand, the uncontaminated hand, to my tongue. I did it a second time for good measure, staring all the while at the plate umpire. "This is Lew's best pitch, Babe. The spitter. Loaded up and ready to dive. Does that come as a big surprise to you?"

Francesco grunted. "What do you think? Last game he pitched I seen spit flying for sixty feet. Damn ball hit the catcher's mitt like a busted watermelon. But Del Rhodes here, he could of caught old Burleigh Grimes. He protects his boy real good. Gets that spit off the ball one way or the other."

Sergeant Schrag studied the white cube. "You mean Bettinger rubbed a few specks of this stuff on the dry ball—then Knebel grabbed the ball and gave his fingers one or two licks before throwing the spitter—and that did it?"

"That's right."

"Holy Christmas, this stuff must be murder. What do you call it, Bettinger?"

"LSD. Lysergic acid diethylamide. Five thousand micrograms in a sugar cube. There's plenty of it down at the lab. No big deal. It's just another hallucinogen."

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By now the fans were in full revolt. Cigar and cigarette smoke hung like an angry thundercloud below the floodlights. Even the box-seat fans were on their feet, shouting. Two knock-down, drag-out fights had flared up in the bleachers. Beer cans and pop bottles had started to litter the field.

I was in no mood to go on with the game. My pitcher was flying high. My third baseman was on his way to the slammer for drug possession. My shortstop and first baseman were somewhere out in the night. I could guess how the front office was going to react.

At this point only Arnie Hunter, faithful Arnie, down in the bullpen, was ready to go.

The umpires—the Three Stooges I'd always called them—were right on top of the action for once. They could see my dilemma. They'd been pretty understanding, too, but they were starting to get restless.

Francesco said, "Two minutes from now, Carver, I want nine of your men on the field."

But at the instant he shouted, "Play ball!" Sandy Estes and Paul Gosling came charging through the low green gate. They were sweating, and they looked grim.

"Hold it!" Sandy yelled. His shout sounded more like a wail.

Our small crowd reassembled at the mound, Francesco's mouth forming a line like a crowbar.

"Lew got to his car before we could catch up with him," Sandy said. "We borrowed the ticket manager's car."

Knebel had bought a convertible in the spring with his $4,000 bonus. "It's class," he'd said. "Not flashy, but classy." Lew, at 18, was the only player on the team who didn't travel mostly by bus. I'd permitted him to take his car on the road after he won six straight in May.

"He drove out Route 324," Sandy went on. "Through Southport, past Victory Gardens. Towards Shelby's Bridge."

"He drove like a maniac. All over the road."

"We chased him, but he must have had that convertible ninety by the time he hit the bridge. We were pretty far behind when it happened."

"When what happened?"

There was a pause. Gosling kicked a beer can toward the first-base coaching box.

Sandy answered, his voice frayed and angry. "I told you what happened, Skipper. *He hit the bridge.*"

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"Hell, he climbed the bridge," Gosling said in a tone as quiet as death. "His car went right up the steel superstructure and flipped. It landed topside down in the middle of the road."

For a moment we all looked blankly at each other. I saw Sergeant Schrag pull the handcuffs from inside his jacket.

"Lew?—" I began.

No one spoke. Sandy Estes made the sign of the cross. Paul Gosling closed his eyes and lowered his head.

Sergeant Schrag snapped the cuffs on Doc Bettinger's unresisting wrists.

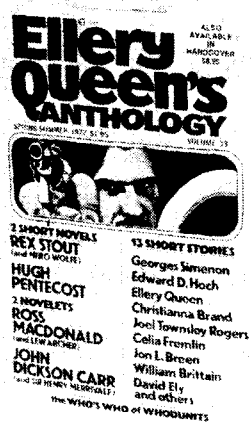
"Lew was a great pitcher," Ed Jenkins murmured.

"Shut up," I said. I don't know why I said it, but I guess it made as much sense as anything else.

Schrag, numbly leading Bettinger toward the cinder path, kept glancing back at us, as if he wanted to explain something, but didn't quite know what it was.

"The D.A. should be able to figure out a charge," he said at last.

"Q"



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FRAMED FOR MURDER

by HAROLD Q. MASUR

A 49-cent ballpoint pen saved my life. Literally. It still writes, but I do not use it. I keep it as a talisman, a reminder to count my blessings in times of adversity.

The pen was in my attaché case when a taxi deposited me in front of the Gotham Trust late Monday morning. Carl Steiner arrived on foot at the same time. "Counselor," he greeted me. "Prompt as usual."

"Hello, Carl."

Steiner represented the sovereign State of New York through its Department of Taxation and Finance. We shook hands, entered the bank, and marched past the tellers' windows toward the desk of branch manager Walter Knox. With his usual air of Olympian detachment, Knox was explaining something to a woman. She turned suddenly, her face shocked; she blinked in recognition and came stumbling toward me.

"My God!" she whispered. "He's dead, Mr. Jordan. The man says Victor is dead."

"Yes, Angela. He died Friday evening. Hadn't you heard?"

She shook her head. "I was out of town, drove back last night. How did it happen?"

"Coronary occlusion. During dinner, at his hotel in Chicago.

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There was nothing they could do. He was gone when the ambulance arrived."

She looked stunned, marooned in a private world of grief or despair. Angela Lowe was Victor Rosemont's assistant at the Rosemont Gallery. And according to Rosemont's estranged wife she was something more than an assistant.

"What brought you to the bank?" I asked.

"I'm here at Victor's request. He needed some papers in Chicago. I have a power of attorney for the safe-deposit box and I was supposed to fly them out to him this afternoon. But now the man says Victor's box is sealed."

"What kind of papers?"

"He found a customer for the Picasso and wanted to show him the authenticating documents."

"When did he call you?"

"He didn't. He couldn't reach me. So he called his wife and told her it was urgent and asked her to give me the message. When she finally got through to me on Friday, it was after 3:00 o'clock and too late for the bank. So I phoned Victor and told him I would do it today, Monday. Now Mr. Knox won't let anyone open the box without a court order."

"Customary procedure, Angela. Look, go back to the gallery and hold the fort. I'll stop by later."

Her steps were slow and tentative—she was a forlorn figure. I opened my attaché case and handed a paper to Walter Knox. It was an order from the Surrogate directing the Gotham Trust to open the box of Victor Rosemont, deceased, for the purpose of removing his Last Will and Testament and filing it for probate.

As Rosemont's lawyer I had drawn his will and knew that he had named me as executor. The drill was a familiar one. Strict compliance with all rules was mandatory. That's why Carl Steiner was present. When a man dies, New York wants its full share of estate taxes. To make sure nobody secretly disposes of any property, they send a representative to itemize all the box's contents when it is first opened. A bank official also attends and he is charged with delivering the will safely to court.

Knox cast his jaundiced eye over the order, found it satisfactory, and led the way down a flight of marble stairs to the vault area. He spoke briefly to the man behind the steel bars. Keys changed hands. The attendant produced a large metal box, convoyed us to a small conference room, and discreetly withdrew.

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We sat. Steiner got out paper and pencil and smiled in anticipation. My attaché case yielded a legal pad and the ballpoint pen, so I could make my own list as Steiner announced the contents.

Knox slid the box to me and as I passed it across to Steiner, my ballpoint rolled to the floor. I had to duck under the table to retrieve it, hearing Steiner say jovially, "All right, gentlemen, let's see what we have here."

They were the last words he ever spoke.

The world blew apart. There was a blinding flash, an earshattering concussion. I felt as if an elephant had stepped on my back. Wood splintered, plaster fell, acrid smoke choked the air. And then a deep dead silence.

I stumbled to my feet, dazed, coughing. The room was a shambles. A jagged hole gaped open on the corridor. The door hung askew on a single hinge. I saw Carl Steiner and turned away. Sitting over the booby-trapped box, he had caught the full brunt. Walter Knox lay hunched in the debris, comatose and bleeding.

Faces materialized in the corridor. The vault attendant, a retired cop, picked his way through the wreckage and got me out of there. "Knox may still be alive," I mumbled. "Somebody call an ambulance."

A diligent young resident at Manhattan General did a quick workup and found me sound. He put four stitches in my cheek and said I was lucky. He suggested 24 hours of bedrest. Detective Lieutenant John Nola, waiting outside the Emergency Room, offered me a lift.

In the police car he told me that Carl Steiner was dead and that Walter Knox was in surgery, his condition critical. Of the three men in the bank's conference room I was the only one presently capable of speech and Nola wanted my version.

Nola was an old friend, precise and incorruptible, so I dealt off the top. I told him about Victor Rosemont's fatal heart attack in Chicago, about Rosemont's will and my appointment at the bank with Carl Steiner of the Estate Tax Section. How somebody must have planted a bomb in Rosemont's safe-deposit box. And about Angela Lowe's narrow escape when she failed to gain access earlier that morning. I painted a brief profile of Rosemont, a prominent art dealer operating out of a highly prestigious gallery on Madison Avenue.

"The Lowe woman," Nola said, "what was she looking for?"

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"Certain papers Rosemont needed. He was in Chicago on business and as usual he carried transparencies of various paintings. One of them was a Picasso and apparently he'd interested a prospective customer. But of course he could not complete a sale of any important canvas without the provenance."

"Without the what?"

"Provenance—documents detailing the origin and background of a painting to establish its authenticity. Collectors seldom pay large sums of money without proof that the work is genuine. He wanted Miss Lowe to get those documents from his safe-deposit box and fly them out to Chicago. When he failed to reach her, he called his wife and asked her to relay the message."

"Hold it, Counselor. You just told me that Rosemont and his wife were separated."

"Temporarily. Margot Rosemont is a very possessive and jealous woman. She suspected her husband of some extracurricular activity with Miss Lowe. She wanted the woman booted out of the gallery. He refused and she left him. This is the third time. But she always came back."

"Any basis for her suspicions?"

"Probably. Angela Lowe is a very attractive dish and Rosemont was an incurable chaser. Margot knew that angle of his personality—she used to be his assistant at the gallery herself, before they were married. Anyway, they stayed in touch, even though she'd walked out. And since it was inconvenient to keep making long-distance calls, Rosemont got through to Margot, and she reached Miss Lowe last Friday, too late for the bank. So Angela went there this morning to follow instructions. She'd been out of town and did not know that Rosemont was dead."

"And she had a power of attorney for his safe-deposit box?"

"Yes. Because Rosemont traveled extensively, searching for art treasures, Angela remained here, in charge of the gallery. In case of a sale the provenance had to be available. And those papers were too valuable to be lying around loose."

"The wife also had a power of attorney?"

"Probably."

Nola reflected thoughtfully for a moment. "So we have a very jealous wife, with access, who calls her husband's mistress, with access, and directs her to open a box that's been wired with lethal explosives."

"You're suggesting that Margot planted the bomb?"

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"It's a possibility."

"I can't buy it, Lieutenant. Suppose Margot was unable to reach Miss Lowe. Suppose Rosemont flew back and went to the box himself."

"You drew his will. Who's his chief legatee?"

"His wife."

"So he opens the box and goodbye husband. They're only separated. She inherits his money, his gallery, his paintings, the works. Either way, she can't lose."

Cynicism. An occupational hazard. Even so, I pondered the notion. If Rosemont had not suffered a fatal heart attack, if the box had not been sealed, Angela Lowe instead of Carl Steiner would now be lying in the morgue, with nobody available to testify that Margot had phoned and prompted Angela's visit to the bank.

I shook my head. "The bomb was in Rosemont's box. I think he was the primary target."

"Who else had access?"

"Me."

"How come?"

"Rosemont gave me a power of attorney six months ago when both he and Miss Lowe flew off to Japan. The art market there is wide-open."

"You having any problems with Rosemont?"

"That's a dry hole, Lieutenant. Don't waste time drilling it."

"Well, now, Counselor, let's give it a thought. Three men are in a small conference room at the bank. A bomb explodes. One man is killed, one is critically wounded, and the third walks away alive and kicking. He just happens to be under a heavy table at precisely the right moment."

"I thought you were my friend."

"A policeman investigating homicide has no friends."

"But I haven't been near Rosemont's safe-deposit box in over five months. You can check the vault records."

"I already have. It's a bum system. You sign a slip, the attendant matches signatures, then discards the form. No records. They say they don't want to bury themselves in paper." He looked at me. "I'm going to visit the widow now. I want you to come along."

Margot Rosemont admitted us to her temporary quarters at the Sutton Towers. She had style and presence and a deceptive look of vulnerability. Her husband's body had been flown back from

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Chicago on Saturday and buried on Sunday. We had agreed that I should proceed at once to probate his will so that business affairs could be carried on without delay.

"Scott!" she exclaimed. "What happened to your face?"

She gaped in dismay when I told her about the explosion, adding, "This is Lieutenant John Nola, in charge of the investigation."

Nola said, "Jordan believes the bomb must have been intended for your husband. Did he have any enemies?"

Her fingers were a bowknot of distress at her throat. "All successful businessmen have enemies. But I don't see how any of them could have got into his safe-deposit box to plant the bomb."

"Well, a number of people had access, Mrs. Rosemont. You. Miss Lowe. The counselor here."

"Please, Lieutenant. I was not one of Victor's enemies."

"You left his room and board. There must have been some friction."

She smiled minimally. "Show me a married couple who do not have friction. Oh, yes, we fought, we separated, but always there was a reconciliation. As a matter of fact, he phoned me Friday afternoon before he died."

"We know. He wanted you to contact Miss Lowe and direct her to remove some papers from his vault."

"Yes. He couldn't reach her. She was not at the gallery."

"I take it you are not charmed by Miss Lowe."

"I detest her."

"Is it your impression that she was trying to steal your husband?"

"If she could, yes."

"And you would have done anything to prevent that?"

"Within reason."

"If she had followed your instructions and opened his safe-deposit box, any relationship between them would have been effectively terminated."

"She was lucky, wasn't she?"

"Two other people were not so lucky. Do you have any proof that your husband actually phoned you on Friday?"

Her eyes opened wide. "Do you doubt my word?"

"Skepticism is a tool of my trade."

"And a very unbecoming one. Of course I have no proof. I did not record his call on tape, if that's what you need."

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"Then we have only your word."

She studied him in a wintry silence. "Lieutenant, I have just been through several very difficult days. I'm really not prepared to cope with such innuendoes at this time."

"A suggestion," I said. "The switchboard operator at Rosemont's hotel in Chicago should have a record of any long-distance calls he made. It's easy enough to check."

Nola walked over to her telephone and made a note of the number. He would check it from his office later.

Margot turned to me. "You told me that under the circumstances the court will probably accept your copy of Victor's will. And if they don't, I'll inherit the estate anyway, as his widow. Isn't that true?"

"It is."

"Then the gallery is mine. I want that woman off the premises. I want Miss Lowe fired. Today. This afternoon."

I shook my head. "Not so fast. As Victor's executor, I need her on the job. She's familiar with all current and pending deals. When the estate is settled, do as you wish."

She thought about it and shrugged. "All right. But it seems wasteful to pay rent for two apartments. Is there any reason I can't move back into our own place?"

Nola had no objection and neither did I.

"Then I'll do it tomorrow," she said.

Outside, Nola and I parted. He was anxious to question the Bomb Squad. Sifting through the rubble, they might have found a clue he could work on. I headed west toward Madison Avenue.

The Rosemont Gallery was an elegantly appointed showplace, with an air of high-priced exclusivity. Victor's specialty had been the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists: Monet, Cézanne, Gauguin, Degas, and all the rest of that brilliantly innovative crew. He had been a surpassing salesman, a man with an imperious presence who spoke in sonorous Shakespearean cadences that both charmed and intimidated important collectors. Dealers fortunate enough to acquire one of the modern masters had willingly split their commissions with Rosemont, knowing that his ability and his connections would invariably command astronomical prices.

Angela Lowe was supervising a rumpled, gnomish figure in the arrangement of new pictures. She came over to me. When I explained the bandage on my face, she blanched, her eyes huge.

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"Mr. Knox is critically injured," I said, "and Steiner, the tax man, is dead."

"It—it could have been me," she whispered.

"Yes. We were both lucky."

She closed her eyes. "Who could have done such a thing?"

"I don't know. But we have to carry on."

"Yes. There's so much to do. We're opening a new Klaus Helman exhibit this week. Klaus," she called, "come here for a moment and meet Mr. Rosemont's lawyer. This is Scott Jordan."

He had a sallow face and paint-stained fingers. "My second show in twenty years," he told me. "Sold one small canvas that time. Forty dollars. Mr. Rosemont was a genius, a man who could recognize talent. The only dealer in this whole crazy business willing to gamble on me. Only names they want. Famous names." He leveled a scornful look. "Because it's a good investment, not because it's beautiful. Imbeciles. Excuse me, please. I have much to do."

Angela watched him for a moment. "Victor had been planning this exhibit for a long time. He pulled strings. He wanted the major critics to see Helman's work. We sent out notices weeks ago. I know he'd want us to open on schedule."

I surveyed the man's work. A landscape, a still life, a figure study, water colors, oils, gouaches, all extravagantly colored and skillfully rendered, but to my eye somehow derivative, reminiscent of the Fauves, those so-called wild beasts of the famous Paris exhibition in the Salon d'Automne around the turn of the century.

Angela and I went back to Rosemont's private office. She seemed preoccupied, unable to concentrate, burdened by the responsibility of managing the gallery on her own, and shaken by her narrow escape from the bomb in Rosemont's safe-deposit box.

"Such a strange way to commit a murder," she said.

I nodded. "Someone wanted to eliminate Victor. So even without that heart attack his days were numbered."

Understandably she was concerned about her job, anticipating her dismissal when Margot took over. I did not disabuse her. There was a knock on the door; it was Klaus Helman asking for her advice on the placement of a canvas.

Alone, I sat back, wondering if the gallery could survive without Rosemont's expertise. It had been so essentially a one-man operation. The phone rang and I answered it. A high-pitched excited voice assaulted my eardrum.

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"Mr. Losemont, you are a cluhk. I speak to my royer. He say you must give back the money or go to plisson."

"Who is this?" I asked.

"You know me too damn well. Sama Kosuri. Kosuri Electronics, Osaka, Japan. I come now for a check, yes? I give you back your no-good Vraminck, yes?"

"Mr. Kosuri, what seems to be the problem?"

"Plobrem is fake Vraminck. Give back money and my royer don't sue. But soon. Day after tomollow I fry back to Osaka."

"There seems to be some misunderstanding. You are not talking to Mr. Rosemont. My name is—"

"No more tlicks." His voice scaled a full octave. "Hundled and twenty thousand dollah too much money for fake."

Angela opened the door, saying, "Did I hear the phone?"

"A Mr. Sama Kosuri," I said, offering the handset.

She took it, pronounced her name and listened, lips compressed. "Now, Mr. Kosuri," she said in a conciliating tone. "I don't think that would be wise. In twenty years no one has ever impugned the integrity or the reputation of this gallery. We allowed you to take that Vlaminck and to have it examined by experts at both the Metropolitan and the Museum of Modern Art, establishments of such international eminence that nobody would presume to question their judgment or their probity. They inspected the provenance and the painting and vouched for its authenticity. Are you now charging *them* with fraud? Of collusion with us? That would be foolhardy, Mr. Kosuri. Your so-called expert is mistaken. And for your information I might add that Mr. Rosemont is no longer with us. He died several days ago."

He hung up on her. She gestured helplessly. "These Japanese! They're so bright. They make such marvelous products and we've bought so many television sets and cameras and motorcycles from them they seem to have more dollars than they can handle. So they've been investing in art, mostly the Impressionists.

"About a month ago Mr. Kosuri walked into the gallery. We had a perfectly splendid Vlaminck, a major work, priced at one hundred and twenty thousand dollars. Mr. Kosuri fell in love with it, but Victor insisted that he have it authenticated. When Kosuri was satisfied, he brought us a certified check for the full amount. He thought the frame was all wrong, so after Victor had another one made he personally delivered the painting to Mr. Kosuri's suite at the Hilton."

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She made a face. "Now the man wants his money back. He's found some buffoon who claims the Vlaminck is a forgery. Which is absurd. The Met itself would have bought the painting if they hadn't been short of cash."

I sighed. I had more than enough to handle without the added headache of a potential lawsuit for fraud, whatever its merits. A lawsuit could tie up the estate for months.

"Are you positive the Vlaminck is genuine?"

"Absolutely."

"Do you have copies of the original provenance?"

"Of course. Every important document is Xeroxed in triplicate."

"Let me have a set."

I borrowed an envelope because my attaché case had been shredded in the explosion. The only part of me that did not seem to ache at the moment were my sideburns. Nevertheless, I went back to my office. I found a stack of messages and a reporter from the *News*, eager for information. I referred him to Lieutenant Nola. One of the messages surprised me. Phone Mr. Stanley Kemper on a matter of considerable urgency.

Kemper is a fussy and humorless lawyer, a nitpicker, a corrosive misanthrope. I filed the message in my wastebasket and twenty minutes later his strident voice was on the line.

"Jordan? I understand you're the attorney for Victor Rosemont's estate."

"Correct."

"Rosemont was a crook."

"You're slandering a dead man, Kemper."

"With justification. He defrauded one of my clients. A Mr. Sama Kosuri. Sold him a fake painting, a forged Vlaminck."

"We deny the allegation."

"I have a sworn affidavit from a recognized expert."

"Tell him to see a good optometrist. And take another look at the provenance. What more does Kosuri want?"

"He wants his money. One hundred and twenty thousand dollars."

"I hope he knows how to whistle."

"We'll sue the estate."

"Your privilege, Kemper. That's what the courts are for."

He struggled for control. "Let's take the painting to any expert you name and see what he says."

Well, I thought, why not? Anything reasonable to avoid litiga-

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tion. "Agreed," I told him. "Set up an appointment at MOMA and let me know." MOMA is not a lady. It is the acronym for the Museum of Modern Art.

He called back in half an hour saying that arrangements had been made for the following afternoon. I promised to be there. I knew that I would accomplish nothing constructive that afternoon. What I needed was rest, so I decided to take the doctor's advice and go home to bed.

A new day had dawned when the telephone awakened me. In my ear the widow Rosemont's voice sounded thin and tense. "Please come quickly," she said. "I'm in Victor's apartment."

Twenty minutes later I was at the entrance of a renovated townhouse with my finger on the bell. Margot Rosemont drew me in and pointed, her face white. Utter chaos. The place had been sacked and ransacked by vandals. And in the midst of all the carnage lay a rumpled figure. Alongside the ruined skull was a Giacometti bronze.

"Klaus Helman," I said. "You found him like this?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Two minutes before I called you."

"Tell me about him, Margot."

"He's an artist, not very successful. I remember we tried to sell some of his work at the gallery, but no one seemed interested. He was always begging Victor to give him a one-man show."

"He'll have it posthumously," I told her. "It was being arranged yesterday."

She stared. "At the gallery? That's insane. There won't be a single customer."

"It was Victor's decision, not Angela Lowe's."

She seemed at a loss. "I don't understand. It was not Victor's style to indulge people. And anyway, who killed him? What was he doing here? Can't you have the body removed?"

"Not me. It's a job for the police. I want you to call them after I leave. Don't tell them I was here. And then make a full inventory. Did Victor keep any valuable artwork in the place?"

"Very little. The insurance was too high. Almost everything was at the gallery, protected by all sorts of alarms and devices."

"All right, Margot. I'll be in touch later. Can you take care of it?"

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She nodded indecisively and watched me leave.

It was time to meet Stanley Kemper and I headed for the Museum of Modern Art. He was waiting in the lobby, Kosuri's Vlaminck wrapped in heavy kraft under his arm. We nodded but did not shake hands. The resident expert was J. Zachary Barnett, bearded and smugly assured; he told us to be seated and took the painting to another room. Time spent alone with Kemper is about as rewarding as watching deodorant commercials. I listened to a dozen semantic fandangos on the laws of consumer fraud.

At last the MOMA expert returned. He shook his head sadly. "Gentlemen, you've been taken. This is not a Vlaminck. Vlaminck's style, yes. A genuine Vlaminck, no. It is definitely a fake, but a remarkably good one. What the forger did here is most interesting. He found some vintage canvas, probably in Paris. I would say that he mixed his own pigments and copied from the original. And then, apparently, he sprayed the finished work with a special restorer's varnish that helps to dry the oils more quickly and produces a craqueleur, as you can see here, these tiny veined cracks generally found in old paintings." Barnett shook his head in admiration. "I would truly like to meet this man. Behind bars, of course. He's a menace. God alone knows how many gullible dealers and collectors he must have duped. At a rough guess I would say this painting is worth at most maybe a hundred dollars."

"You see. You see." Kemper was jumping triumphantly. "What did I tell you? Rosemont was a crook."

I ignored him and said to Barnett, "Less than a month ago you people authenticated this very same Vlaminck."

"No, sir. We authenticated one that looked like it. Not this one."

"What are you going to do about it?" Kemper demanded.

I gave him a pitying look. "Your Mr. Kosuri is a lulu, Kemper. He digs up a fake, hides the genuine Vlaminck, and then demands a refund."

It brought him so close to apoplexy that I almost relented. Instead, I walked out of the room. He dogged my heels, yapping outside a telephone booth while I called my office and learned that Lieutenant Nola wanted to see me without delay. I lost sight of Kemper's rancorous face when a taxi carried me off.

At the precinct Lieutenant Nola sat behind his desk and regarded me for a long moment, his dark eyes speculative, his

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mouth tight. "Well, Counselor," he said finally, "we've got another one. A new corpse. Laid out in Rosemont's apartment. The widow found him. Little fella. Some kind of an artist. Klaus Helman. Know the name?"

"I met him once, briefly. What happened? Heart attack?"

"You could say that. Brought on by a cracked skull."

"When?"

"Some time last night. Mrs. Rosemont moved back this morning and there he was. Somebody had torn the place apart. She was in no condition to talk. And, incidentally, there is no record of any call from Rosemont's hotel room in Chicago to his wife. Was this Helman a good painter?"

"I'm not an art critic, Lieutenant."

"We checked his studio. Very unusual. Three locks on the outside, a police lock on the inside. And a strange cache of artwork."

"Strange how?"

"One of my lab men, this new breed, college fella, he's an art buff. Said it looked as if someone had looted the Louvre." Nola consulted his notes. "Pictures that looked like Matisse, Gauguin, Degas, Cézanne. And hidden away in a closet we found a steel box with papers, some of them made out to the Rosemont Gallery—records of sale, certificates, affidavits. What was that word you used?"

"Provenance."

"Yeah. A lot of them. So we have to run a check on this Helman."

My mind was racing. "By all means," I said.

A small card in the window cordially invited the public to view the work of Klaus Helman starting on Saturday the 19th. But Angela Lowe was not especially sanguine about sales. She looked harried. "Klaus didn't come in today. Nothing has been hung in the back room yet and I can't seem to reach him at his studio. Usually he's very dependable."

"Helman won't be in at all," I told her. "He's dead."

Sudden distress flashed across her face. "Oh, no," she moaned. "I can't take much more of this. First Victor and now Klaus. What happened?"

She listened and then fled to the office. Nola shrugged. We gave her a couple of minutes to compose herself. She was sitting behind Rosemont's desk, staring into space.

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"Angela," I said quietly, "we need your help."

She swallowed and nodded.

"How long have you known?" I asked.

"How long have I know what?"

"That Klaus Helman was an expert art forger. That he'd been counterfeiting the Impressionists for some time. That he knew every trick in the book. That he connived with Victor to supply the gallery with spurious works of art. That somehow Victor had lost his moral compass and exploited his reputation to deceive and defraud his customers. Did you know from the beginning?"

After a long moment she found her voice. "I never really knew for certain, Mr. Jordan. But recently I began to suspect that something seemed out of focus. And then after Mr. Kosuri complained about his Vlaminck, it began to explain a number of strange incidents."

"Such as?"

"Giving Helman a one-man show when he knew it was doomed from the start, just to keep Klaus happy."

"Do you have any idea how many forgeries may have been sold?"

She gestured helplessly. "It's a mess, Mr. Jordan. Victor had customers all over the world. Two months ago he sold a Degas pastel to a West German banker. And before that a Renoir water color to one of the oil sheiks from Kuwait. He sometimes accepted cash and the transactions never appeared on our books."

"So Victor must have salted away quite a bit of money."

"I suppose."

"And you, Angela? How about you? Have you put away a lot of money?"

She blinked at me. "I beg your pardon."

"Money, Angela. True, at first you only suspected a conspiracy between Victor and Helman. And then, somehow, you stumbled onto hard evidence. And you began to shake him down. Because you realized that he would never divorce Margot to marry you, so you demanded a piece of the action. Security for your future."

Her face was stiff with restraint. "You're insane. That's absolute nonsense."

"Ah, Angela, such righteous indignation! And such brash conduct. You should have known that Victor would never hold still for blackmail. He'd know that it never ends, that no matter how much he shelled out you might still blow the whistle on him some-

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day. He really had only one solution. Nullify the danger by eliminating you. And since he was a devious man he cooked up an elaborate scheme.

"It was Victor himself who put the bomb in his safe-deposit box. The implication, of course, would be that someone had tried to kill him. But it was really meant for you, Angela. He called his wife from Chicago and asked her to instruct you to open his box. But he used a pay phone booth so there would be no record of the call. And if his wife talked, he would deny phoning her. Margot had access to the box. It was common knowledge that she blamed you for her separation. Which would make her a prime suspect. She might even be tried and convicted. To Rosemont everyone was expendable."

"What tipped you?" Nola demanded.

"Your discovery that Rosemont's authentication papers were hidden in Helman's studio. Victor was a greedy man. Those documents were too valuable. He would not allow them to be destroyed in the explosion. So he removed them from the safe-deposit box. He had no reason to do that if he hadn't arranged the booby-trap himself."

"He trusted Helman?"

"Sure. They were partners in the conspiracy. They needed each other."

"Why was Helman killed?"

"Because he had forged a Vlaminck, copying an original that had already been authenticated and sold. Rosemont substituted the forgery for the genuine painting while he was arranging for a new frame. Then Rosemont suffered a heart attack. Helman knew that the real Vlaminck was probably hidden in Rosemont's apartment and decided to retrieve it for himself. It was, after all, worth a lot of money.

"But someone else had the same idea. Our friend Angela. She guessed what had happened when the buyer of the Vlaminck complained. And as a special friend of the boss, she had a key to Rosemont's apartment. She probably got there before Helman and took cover when she heard him at the door. Then she sneaked up from behind and brained him."

She appealed to Nola. "Make him stop. He doesn't know what he's talking about."

I said, "What about those fingerprints you found on the Giacometti, Lieutenant?"

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"Listen," she said frantically, "I rearranged that statue on Victor's mantel many times."

"Yes, but will you be able to convince a jury?" I asked. "Or explain how you managed to get possession of the Vlaminck? The police know how to search, Angela. They'll take your place apart. And they'll find the painting. They'll find witnesses who must have seen you in the neighborhood. They'll find unexplained sums of money you extorted from Victor."

She seemed to shrink before our eyes, suddenly ill. Nola took a slip of paper from his pocket and began to read the lady her rights. Then he turned to me. "I'm curious, Counselor. You had no idea what kind of rank specimen you were representing in this Rosemont?"

I looked at him, aggrieved. "If I had known, would I have accepted the fee he paid me last year? For twelve months of legal services. Claimed he was short of cash and offered me a small Modigliani nude. Which I grabbed before he could change his mind." I shook my head in disgust. "Probably something Helman knocked out one morning before breakfast. Worth maybe fourteen dollars. Why, the damn frame cost me more than that."

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